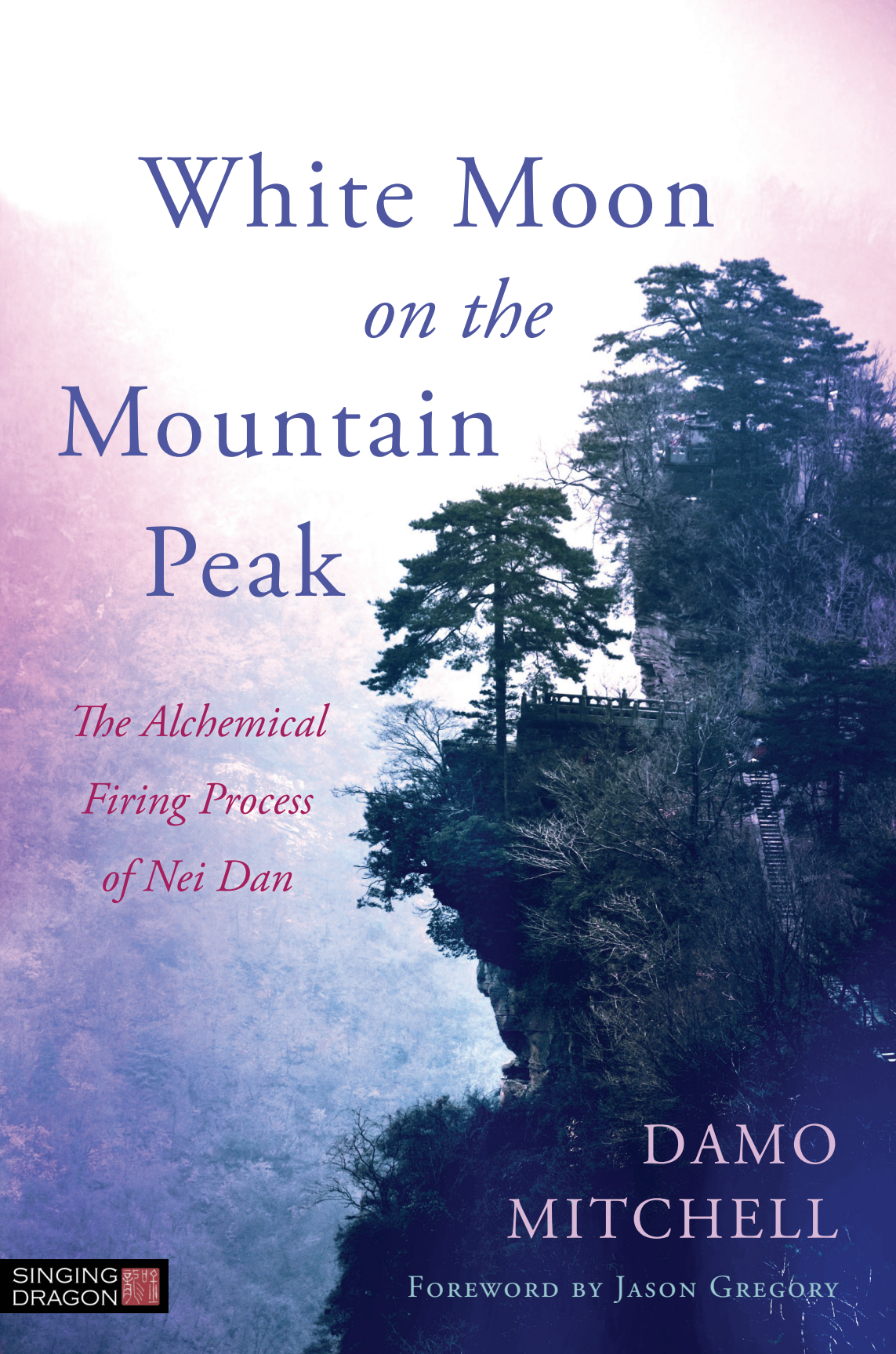
White Moon *on the* Mountain Peak

The Alchemical Firing Process of Nei Dan



DAMO MITCHELL

Foreword by Jason Gregory

SINGING DRAGON

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FOREWORD

The Daoist Key to Naturalness

Nothing frustrates the mind more than its attempts to be spontaneously natural without any intention to do so. We encounter this frustration within most spiritual traditions around the world. This becomes a battle between our conscious self (ego) and the adaptive mystical unconscious. This dilemma is explored and brought face to face with our awareness of the core of the problem most categorically in the mystical traditions of the East and the philosophy and methods of practice that have evolved from these Asian cultures as a result. Both the philosophy and methods of practice have tried to deal with this paradoxical obstacle of trying to be natural without *trying* to be natural. We have had philosophers and practitioners debating for millennia over this universal conundrum.

As far as our historical records suggest, this problem originated in the classical period of Chinese philosophy known as the 'Hundred Schools of Thought' (諸子百家), which flourished from the sixth century to 221 BC, during the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period of ancient China. In this period we saw the rise of the four great philosophers of ancient China who all in some way contributed to a deep understanding of our attempts to be natural. They were Laozi, Confucius, Mencius and Zhuangzi. We could debate all day long who we think has the superior philosophy or if they all somehow contribute to further our knowledge of the matter, but that is not the point. The key argument that gets to the point is whether we can induce naturalness (*Ziran* in Chinese 自然) or whether it comes from a state of non-doing.

This is best symbolized by the different perspectives of Laozi and Confucius. Both were concerned with how a human being accords to the Way (*Dao* in Chinese 道) and lives its virtue (*De* in Chinese 德) as a result. One of the only things they would agree upon was that we need to return

to our nature to be in the cosmic river of Dao. Yet both of their philosophies to live our nature were diametrically opposed.

Confucius believed in the 'carving and polishing of the block of wood' perspective. His belief is that we should chisel away at our beastly character to cultivate the Confucian virtues that are supposed to turn us into a Superior Man (*Junzi* in Chinese 君子) who is in the end only functioning as an empty vessel for the forces of Dao to work through. The Confucian approach to naturalness, as a result of carving and polishing, is the method of *Wei Wu Wei* (為無為), meaning doing non-doing. Naturally, to be in the flow of the Way was to be obtained through following the ethics, odes, rituals and sacrifices of Confucian philosophy (*Ru* in Chinese 儒), which is supposed to shape our psychology to sense intuitively the metaphysical Way of the Dao in our ordinary life. But a big problem with this approach is it assumes that the Dao adheres to the philosophy of Ru and not the other way around. We lose sight of the meaning of ritual, as the Vedic civilization of the Indus Valley in India and Pakistan did as well, and we believe that the virtue of spontaneity is only confined within ritual and those who practise it.

Laozi, on the other hand, believes this approach is a disaster and goes on to explain that the Confucians are still interpreting the spontaneous nature of Dao with the conscious mind, which indicates that even the Junzi is not really an empty vessel. Instead of carving and polishing the block of wood, Laozi would suggest we stick to the 'uncarved block' or unhewn wood. Holding on to the uncarved block, we quell all our attempts to be natural and just allow spontaneity to be as it will in our life, with no premeditated control of it. This leads to the essential Daoist art of living known in Chinese as *Wu Wei* (無為), meaning non-doing. According to Laozi, Wu Wei is the way to align our mind to the Dao because we have stopped trying to control our experience. He believed that if we embraced non-doing in our life, the conscious self (ego) would loosen its grip of tyranny within our mind so the mystical unconscious can allow our experience to be as it will, without our personal agenda and desires of life projected upon it. But we should keep in mind that Laozi is not saying literally that we should do nothing and become a stone Buddha. What he is saying is that when we don't force life to be a certain way and instead allow life to happen – Wu Wei – we accord to the Dao because the sense of 'I' has become subservient to the Way of nature, which is spontaneous. This means that outwardly we could be actively doing things but within we are effortless because the sense of personality has marinated and become absorbed in the Dao.

We discover this Laozian understanding of Wu Wei also in the Indian epic *Bhagavad Gita* with the Sanskrit *Nishkam Karma* where Krishna advocates to Arjuna to remain active but be inwardly effortless without the need of being rewarded for the fruits his labour. Essentially, Krishna wants Arjuna to be so effortless that his actions are completely selfless because the 'I' has dissolved. The *Bhagavad Gita* states this in two key verses:

> To action alone hast thou a right and never at all to its fruits; let not the fruits of action be thy motive; neither let there be in thee any attachment to inaction.
>
> Fixed in yoga, do thy work, O Winner of wealth (Arjuna), abandoning attachment, with an even mind in success and failure, for evenness of mind is called yoga.

When we attempt to act with the sense of being the doer, we resist the Dao and suffer as a result. To use an example, when we try to open a door with a key, if we force the key when we turn it, there is resistance, but if we are soft and just jiggle and apply enough pressure, then the key moves smoothly and the door opens. This is a metaphor for our life and also for the way our own psychological conditioning blocks the stream of the universe from flowing through our innate stillness of mind.

As a result of both the Confucian and Laozian perspectives of how to be naturally in harmony with the Dao, we discover the Daoist predicament. We can all say from our vantage point of 2500 years past their time that both present good arguments which we can see exhibited in our own life for those who are paying attention to their inner and outer worlds. This is why Mencius was impartial to both sides, and although he is historically thought of as a Confucian, he often sounds more like a mouthpiece for the wisdom of Laozi than anyone else.

Clarity is not brought to this predicament until the end of the Warring States period when the philosophy of Zhuangzi came into existence. With regard to this debate between Laozi and Confucius, Zhuangzi would say there is no right or wrong. A key theme of his philosophy was that human beings are fundamentally flawed because we have the ability to discern between 'this' and 'that' in our essence (*Qing* in Chinese 情). This leads to subjective opinions of right and wrong, good and evil, arbitrary judgements and so on. According to Zhuangzi, if you are attempting to define the indescribable Dao, then nothing is more stupid than this. This is reflected in the text attributed to him known simply as the *Zhuangzi*. This

is one of the most beautiful texts which stands side by side with the *Dao De Jing* as a classic of Daoist thought, full of humour, mystery, paradox and wisdom. In the *Zhuangzi*, we find him poking fun at both opposing perspectives, not in the sense that they are both wrong, but because they both fall into failure when they believe their own philosophy is the 'only' way to live according to Dao. It was absurd for Zhuangzi to think that spontaneity had a certain philosophical dress sense it related to. That would be like favouring the spontaneity in music over the spontaneity in sport. The problem with this is that, as a result, we get lost in the projections of our own opinions of whether we prefer music or sport without perceiving the Dao move spontaneously in both. And it is because of this intellectual preference for what we like or dislike, or find acceptable or not acceptable, that Zhuangzi's focus is on the art of living in harmony with the Dao through becoming skilled at it.

This skill of the art of living is illustrated best by the story of Butcher Ding (classically known as Cook Ding) in the *Zhuangzi*. In true Zhuangzian fashion, he uses the graphic description of Ding hacking up oxen piece by piece essentially to shock, because Zhuangzi is trying to emphasize that perfection is found everywhere in the world. Zhuangzi actually wanted this reaction because in the Warring States of China butchers were thought of as the lowest of the low, so it is extremely strange to see Ding portrayed as an exemplar of the Dao.

In the story of Butcher Ding, Lord Wen-Hui is curious about his remarkable skill. He is amazed how Ding's blade gracefully glides through the ox with no resistance and the ox falls apart effortlessly. Ding explained to Lord Wen-Hui that he went through various stages before attaining this skill. First, he said that at the beginning all he could see was ox and so he didn't know where to start because he was only relying on his senses. Then, after three years, Ding said he no longer saw the ox as a whole. This means that he had an analytical understanding of how an ox goes together. After this understanding, Ding came to the final stage where he explains to Lord Wen-Hui:

> I encounter it with my spirit and don't look with my eyes. My senses and conscious awareness have shut down and my spiritual desires take me away.

He has shut down his external senses and his mind so his spiritual desires (*Shen Yu* in Chinese 神欲) are released and they are what guide him, essentially being moved by Dao. We could call this the embodied mind because he trained his psychosomatic organism sufficiently to be naturally

spontaneous without a sense of 'Ding' the person doing anything. In cognitive science they would say Ding has trained his hot cognition (body and mind's automatic instinctual response) so well that he can shut down his cold cognition (conscious control of the instinctual response).

Ding goes on to explain this skill to Lord Wen-Hui by telling him that after 19 years he has never sharpened his knife once because he doesn't touch anything in the process of cutting. This is a metaphor for our life. In moving through life skilfully, like the blade through the ox, we accord to our Heavenly nature and move in resonance with the Dao. The blade is our being, our body, Heart-mind and spirit. So this story is not about Lord Wen-Hui becoming a skilled butcher. It's a way of shutting down our senses and analytic mind so the Heavenly force can move through us. Early in the story, Lord Wen-Hui was amazed at Butcher Ding's skill and asked how he could be so skilful. Ding replied:

> What your servant values is the Way (*Dao* 道), which goes beyond mere skill or technique.

Ding is explaining that it is not about skill per se, but instead it is about being in touch with the Dao. So the argument Zhuangzi illustrates through the story of Ding is not a matter of whether Laozi's philosophy to be natural is better than Confucius's or vice versa, or a matter of whether we should *do* something to be natural or not. Instead, it is about how can we become spontaneously natural through the analytical mind – or conscious self in other words – if it is itself unnatural and actually an artificial by-product of culture and society? Essentially, how can this artifice of a person (ego) I believe I am get rid of itself? This confusing paradox was a key element in why the great alchemical traditions of the world came into existence. None is more important than the art of Nei Dan (內丹 internal alchemy) in China, which offers us a way out of this confusion and back into harmony with the Dao, and which is the primary focus of this Daoist epic presented by Damo Mitchell.

To understand Nei Dan, or any other alchemical tradition for that matter, we must not only be adept in intuiting the philosophy of such systems of thought, but also be as skilled as Butcher Ding in the practical application of the methods and techniques that evoke the philosophy as a living reality. Only a rare breed of individual can usually bring this forth, and Damo Mitchell is a thoroughbred within the stable of humanity. He not only brings both together but can articulate it and teach such a complex subject in a way that we can all digest and assimilate. Some people in life

are unfortunate and never open the universe's vast library of knowledge on Eastern wisdom, and there are others who get to open the library later in life. But then there are those rare souls who were born in the library and become the librarians of the perennialism of the East. Mitchell is one of those librarians who spread the wisdom of the East to the world. He was born into Eastern philosophy and practice, and began his life's work from the beginning of it. Not many can say that, and that is why I am saying no one else is better skilled than him to compile such an extensive work on Nei Dan, which covers not only all bases but also what the bases are built on.

Mitchell is a Western man only in appearance, as his mind is Eastern from his life lived in the philosophy and the internal arts of Asia, China especially. He is the result of a growing interest in the mystical traditions of the East in the Western world. A spiritual renaissance is beckoning humanity, where the wisdom of the East is leaving the confines of Asia and being reinvigorated by Western teachers such as Damo Mitchell. Through his deep understanding of the Daoist arts, Western and also Eastern spiritually inclined people can finally assimilate the practical application and techniques of Nei Dan to fully live the philosophy of our ancient Eastern masters.

We will reap the benefits of this work on Nei Dan because, even though the information in this book is guided towards our own enlightenment and the transcendent Dao, it is also very timely. I say this because Mitchell explains in the text that most forms of spiritual cultivation begin with different methods of open awareness meditation techniques focusing on emptiness and the silencing of thoughts to acquire the stillness of the *Zen* (禪) mind, which is the mind that evokes our natural spontaneity in harmony with the Dao. But the problem with this approach, and also why it is timely, is that most modern people, both Western and Eastern, have no frame of reference for how or why they are doing this and ultimately have not prepared the soil within their body and mind to experience prolonged states of stillness. One who has not prepared the soil within the body and mind usually falls into delusion because the philosophy and methods of practice of the East are only understood superficially. They are taken up more so because they are trendy and a clever way of sustaining our ego in the disguise of a new 'shiny' spiritual persona. Instead of becoming humble and seeking the low places where Dao is found, we perpetuate our primarily Western temperament of the 'on high' hypnosis cloaked in the traditions of the East.

This subtle disguise has been with us since the counter-culture movement of the 1960s and 1970s and survived through the hippy and more recently in new-age spirituality. A hippy, for example, often misinterprets following the Dao with statements such as 'I'm going with the flow, dude.' But a Daoist would explain that only those who are empty within the mind can flow with Dao, and so that statement is only intellectual, not a natural experience. To experience Dao, the sense of 'I' must not arise; hence there is nobody there in spontaneity. So the hippy's idea of freedom is just a dress sense to show off to other people, not the real freedom of stillness within. Comparable with this is the way people attracted to Eastern wisdom understand through the 'on high' of new-age spirituality and only dabble in the philosophy and methods of practice rather than following them sincerely.

We find this best when people attend a ten-day silent *vipassana* course. Once it is completed, they just can't stop chit-chatting incessantly, which is evidence that it was more about completing the course to tell other people about it than actually learning real mindfulness from it. This results from an underlying tension you feel in most people, which comes through their speech, posture and rigid opinions. This underlying tension is even more evident in those who practise taiji, hatha yoga and other forms of meditation. It all results from a lack of understanding and sincerity of abiding by the philosophy and practice of whatever method it may be. This tension we acquire from culture and society eclipses our naturalness, and so even if we begin with open awareness meditation, the tension has not been dealt with. The soil of our mind turns into sewage with not much hope for us to cultivate the sprouts of a lotus flower to become natural. But in this book we realize Nei Dan is a plough that will dig into the tension within our individual energy matrix. It will bring you back to earth to show you that where you once thought you were on top of a mountain, in truth you were only on a small foothill before Mount Everest.

Nei Dan is a way out of this debacle of how to return to the naturalness of Dao. The 'mind stuff' we accumulate within the grey matter of our nervous system throughout our life is what Nei Dan seeks to transmute, so we can turn the lead of the artificial person back into the natural immortal. We usually only experience or perceive the natural spontaneity of Dao within many art forms. We might see a divine performance in music or a piece of spontaneous magic in sport, but if you ask either person to recreate their divine performance or piece of magic, anxious thoughts will rise up in their mind and the recreation is sabotaged because the idea of a 'person'

doing it comes back into consciousness. Naturalness is eclipsed when we do not allow the wisdom of the unconscious to take control of the body and conscious self.

The dilemma tackled with Nei Dan is how to reside in the spontaneous nature of Dao permanently. To this dilemma and fundamental paradox, Damo Mitchell has gone to the farthest extremes of inner alchemy to bring back a map to guide us through our own internal landscape on to the irreducible essence of Dao. The map is this profound book on Nei Dan, and if you allow it to soak into your mind, you will be on your way to understanding the mystery you *are*. Then we will be natural again, as natural as the Japanese *unsui* (雲水) – a term meaning 'cloud and water' – because without trying an enlightened master drifts like a cloud and flows like water.

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Foot of the Holy Mountain Arunachala
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DISCLAIMER

The author and publisher of this material are not responsible in any way whatsoever for any injury that may occur through practising the exercises outlined in this book.

The exercises and practices may be too strenuous or too risky for some people, and so you should consult a qualified doctor before attempting anything from this book. It is also advised that you proceed under the guidance of an experienced teacher of the internal arts to avoid confusion and injury.

Note that any form of internal exercise is not a replacement for conventional health practices, medicines or any form of psychotherapy.

NOTES ON THE TEXT

Throughout this book I have used the Pinyin system of Romanization for the majority of Chinese words. Please note that much of the theory in this book differs greatly from Western science. The classical Chinese approach to understanding the organs of the body, for example, is based around the function of their energetic system rather than their physical anatomy. To distinguish the two understandings from each other, I have used capitalization to indicate the Chinese understanding of the term. For example, 'Heart' refers to the classical Chinese understanding of the organ, whereas 'heart' refers to the physical organ as understood within contemporary Western biological sciences.

In addition, I have had a lot of correspondence from native Chinese speakers who have been reading my books. This, combined with an increase in the number of Chinese students, means that it is wise for me to put the Chinese characters next to each Pinyin term that I use in my writing. In order not to 'overcrowd' the text, I have included the Chinese character on the first occasion each Pinyin term is used. The only exception to this is if it seemed relevant to include the Chinese character on another occasion, such as when listing Pinyin terms. There is also a full glossary of Chinese terminology at the rear of this book.

PREFACE

This is the fourth book that I have written with Singing Dragon. *Daoist Nei Gong: The Philosophical Art of Change*[1] introduced the principles of esoteric Daoism that I practise; this was an introduction for me to the world of professional writing. The second book, *Heavenly Streams: Meridian Theory in Nei Gong*,[2] was written in response to two of the biggest queries I receive as a teacher of Qi Gong: 'How do I learn to feel what is going on within my energy body?' and 'How does Chinese medicine connect with the rest of the internal arts?' The third book was *The Four Dragons: Clearing the Meridians and Awakening the Spine in Nei Gong*.[3] I wrote this book because I wanted to introduce the concept of Dao Yin as well as one of the most useful sets of exercise I have come across for conditioning the spine and connective tissues of the body.

This book now looks at the more advanced practice of Nei Dan. It has been, by far, the most challenging of the four to write. This is because I wanted to present a book that would help to alleviate a lot of the confusion that exists around the subject of Nei Dan and at the same time write something that was based in the classical texts. Once I began to write, I realized just how much information was involved in a project such as this! I have tried to include my own experience of each stage of development up to the point that I am able to, because I feel it is important for a teacher to impart personal knowledge of a practice, not just information that has been passed down to them by their own teachers.

When I first began putting the plan together for this book, I was living in a small tent on the edge of a forest in Sweden. I was there for four months and so made good use of the time, putting the outlines for the manuscript

1 Mitchell, D. (2011) *Daoist Nei Gong: The Philosophical Art of Change.* London: Singing Dragon.

2 Mitchell, D. (2013) *Heavenly Streams: Meridian Theory in Nei Gong.* London: Singing Dragon.

3 Mitchell, D. (2014) *The Four Dragons: Clearing the Meridians and Awakening the Spine in Nei Gong.* London: Singing Dragon.

together with pen and paper. Early each day during this time I would sit with my students practising Nei Dan and then speak with them about their own experiences of the process they were going through. What is always made clear to me when I have the chance to speak with practitioners of Nei Dan is how tangible the results really are. These results are the same whether speaking with Western students in a forest in Scandinavia or a Daoist recluse living in the mountains of China. Despite this, there seems to be little writing actually outlining what these tangible results are. This really, in my opinion, is one of the most important parts of any practice such as this. What are the tangible signs that should appear at each stage in my practice?

I began practising meditation at a very young age. Strangely, I was much more accomplished at working with my mind when I was a young child than I was as I grew older. As a child, I had only very basic-level instruction that had come down to me via the Japanese martial arts I was studying. Despite this, I clearly remember being able to enter states of stillness that I would struggle to return to when meditation became more important to me in my twenties. From these early days I began exploring Buddhist and Hindu systems of meditative practice, which I found fascinating but never really became absorbed in. Full engagement with meditative training came when I began to look at the process of Daoist alchemy. At first I studied from books as I had only access to Buddhist systems where I was living, but then, as soon as I was old enough, I headed out to find people who could teach me the Daoist methods of working with consciousness. The main reason that Daoist alchemical methods caught my attention was their crossover with Qi Gong, which I had already been studying for some time, and the tangible results that were clearly identified by my teachers. The experiences that show us we are making progress give a clear outlined path to follow, which leads ever further down the rabbit hole; this was a path that I felt I was missing with other practices I had tried. Although this lack of clear direction may be fine for many people, I am quite a direct person who likes to know where I am supposed to be going with any internal practice. The most amazing realization came for me when I understood that everything has, sitting behind it, an energetic imprint. It does not matter whether this thing is an inanimate object, a part of a living creature or even an emotional state; there is always an energetic aspect sitting there in the background. Then, if we manage to look further back beyond this energetic imprint, there is a spiritual imprint which reflects the existence of said entity within the realm of pure consciousness. Alchemy is the process of working with the various 'background' imprints that sit behind the various aspects of human consciousness in order to locate

the spiritual 'substances' from which we are created. This means that instead of working with a particular mind-state, as is the case with many other systems of meditation, we are instead looking for the energetic patterning behind it. This then gives us something that can be felt and even seen within the space of our Heart-mind. The term 'alchemy' came about because the next stage is then to take these 'substances' and work with them to allow us to return ourselves to the original state, a state closer to Dao.

This way of working makes alchemical writings very important to understand. This is because each part of the metaphor tells us what aspect of our mind we should be working with, what the nature of the energetic imprint is behind this aspect of mind and then, finally, what is the experience we are supposed to have when we successfully manage to do this. For example, the term 'true silver' refers metaphorically to the state of attaining original spirit. However, it is not only a metaphor because it also refers to the colour we should perceive when our awareness touches upon this aspect of our inner universe. The imagery is telling us that we should see a silver/white light within the darkness; this is the required sign of attaining connection to this aspect of our being. This is why the Daoist tradition interests me so much; obviously, they were very practical people who sought to leave us clear guidance of an experiential path that we should follow in order to replicate the results they themselves sought.

In putting together this book, I have done my best, clumsy though it may be, to outline the various foundation and intermediate stages of Daoist Nei Dan together with clear signs of progress. In doing so, I have linked the practice back to classical teachings in order to help readers understand the information contained within these ancient writings. I am no scholar, though, and so the majority of this book looks at the practicalities and potential pitfalls of alchemical training. This all means that this book, though based in classical teachings, is also subjective in its view of the process through which Nei Dan practice should take you. All I can ever do is present to you the process of Daoist alchemy through the lens of myself, a Western explorer of the path to Dao. I hope that this resonates with some following a similar path. For the last month I have been sitting in a little cottage in the north of the UK, putting the finishing touches to the text, which has been hard work but very rewarding. I hope that some may find it useful and that others are inspired to have a go at training in Daoist Nei Dan methods.

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Chapter 1

BACKGROUND TO NEI DAN

Starting out in Nei Dan (內丹) or 'internal alchemy' is much like building a campfire. In the beginning we must prepare the ground and collect together firewood. The fire must be laid out in the correct way and only then can it be lit. The kindling is burned first to produce a small flame and from here we tend to the fire until it is burning brightly, producing the warmth and light we are seeking. The fire still cannot be left alone, though; now it needs constant feeding of small amounts of firewood to keep it going. If we neglect the flame for too long, it will go out and our work will have been for nothing; we must start over again.

The practice of Nei Dan must be approached in the same manner. We prepare our body and set up the correct internal conditions for our practice. From here we begin to 'light the fire' through the use of our breath and very precise methods until we have a healthy degree of energetic warmth in the lower abdomen. Our daily practice from here on keeps this fire lit, and thus keeps the internal change process inherent within Daoist alchemy going. If we ignore our practice for too long, then the skill of Nei Dan is lost and so we must begin anew. For those new to the concept of Nei Dan and Daoist meditation methods, it is important to be aware of this: Nei Dan cannot be picked up and dropped as you please. In order to get results, you must be committed and prepared to establish a regular practice. More than simply a way to relax your mind and body, Nei Dan Gong is a powerful form of transformation for both the mind and the spirit. It is the heart and soul of Daoism and from these sitting practices the whole panoply of the Daoist arts was born.

Anybody who begins to look into any of the Daoist arts will at some point come across the alchemical teachings of this ancient tradition. Based in the tantric methodologies of working with various energetic substances contained within the body, Nei Dan or alchemy has long been the focal point of the majority of Daoist lineages. Although Nei Dan shares some

common ground with other forms of Eastern meditation, it also has distinct differences which make it a unique form of transformational sitting practice. Unlike many other traditions, Nei Dan sitting practices seamlessly work together with standing and moving energetic exercises such as Dao Yin (導引) and Qi Gong (氣功) to create a dynamic system which encompasses a variety of internal techniques. Health and spirituality are inextricably combined to form a holistic internal process that is both complex and yet, at its core, profoundly simple. Unlike many modern forms of meditation which have been simplified to suit modern lifestyles, Daoist Nei Dan cannot be undertaken by those who do not have the dedication to fully immerse themselves in it. More than just a way to relax the mind and body, Daoist alchemy works to change the very way that a practitioner's energetic matrix functions through consistent and continuous practice. It is an advanced practice for those wishing to fully understand the Daoist wisdom tradition and for those who are adventurous of spirit: many of the inner transformations that take place can be powerful in terms of the changes made to a person's outlook on life and perception of the nature of reality.



Figure 1.1: Nei Dan Characters

Figure 1.1 shows the Chinese characters for Nei Dan. The first character, Nei, means internal; this separates the tradition from the external alchemical methods from which it evolved. Internal alchemy is based on working with energetic substances contained within the human energetic system whereas the earlier (but still practised today) external alchemy is based on combining various external substances to create a 'pill' which is swallowed by the practitioner. The second character, Dan, quite literally means cinnabar, the ore of mercury, which in the case of internal alchemy refers metaphorically to the divine substance that is produced within the consciousness of the practitioner through diligent and correct practice. Due to difficulties

directly translating Chinese terms into English, the term 'internal alchemy' is generally used when discussing these methods.

In order to understand exactly what sort of meditation Nei Dan is, we must first look at the various broad categories that many forms of meditation fall under. These categories are as follows:

- *Visualization meditation.* Many forms of meditation are based around the practitioner building an image within their mind's eye. Imagination is heavily used to create either a simple visualization such as a colour or small object or complex mandala-type images or sacred locations which practitioners use their imagination to journey to. Many of these visualized images are actually based on accounts of experiences people have had spontaneously arise during other non-imagination-based meditations. This is probably the most common form of meditation that beginners will encounter.

- *Devotional meditation.* Devotional meditation is often closely linked with religious practice, but not always. A deity or spiritual being is visualized or contacted through mantra or another similar technique. The practitioner aims either to communicate with or to seek guidance from the deity so that they may be led through increasing levels of transcendent comprehension. This form of meditation is used heavily within religious Daoist sects and it is possible to argue that prayer is a form of devotional meditation.

- *Empty meditation.* Meditation based solely around emptiness provides little in the way of method or instruction. Any guidance would be seen as an external distraction from the essence of the training and so is avoided as much as possible. Instead, practitioners aim to enter emptiness by silencing their mind through prolonged practice of sitting. These forms of meditation require a great deal of patience and often the assistance of direct mind-to-mind transmission from an accomplished master within the tradition.

- *Observational meditation.* This form of meditation works by getting the practitioner to observe a naturally unfolding phenomenon within their own body. The most commonly used focal point for observation is the breath. The idea is that by observing something we accomplish several things. First, we learn more about the nature of mind and its fluctuations through how it affects that which we are observing. Second, we give the mind something to observe,

which allows it to gradually become quiet; the analogy often used for this process is giving the monkey (mind) a banana (something to observe) to keep it quiet. Finally, by observing a process we give it the space and attention to improve, and thus the efficiency of the workings of our body and mind increases.

- *Alchemical meditation.* The final broad category of meditation methods is the alchemical category. This is the form of meditation based around direct use of and transformation of energetic substances within the body. Through gradual refinement of vibratory frequencies within the realm of the energy body and later the consciousness, it is possible to move through a powerful form of inner transformation. It is worth noting here, though, that alchemical meditation systems (sometimes known as tantric methods) generally serve to pave the way for more passive states of mind akin to 'emptiness meditation'.

DAOIST NEI DAN

Daoist Nei Dan is primarily a form of alchemical meditation as it aims to work directly with the three treasures of Jing (精), Qi (氣) and Shen (神). Rather than aiming to work directly with the mind from the outset, Daoist Nei Dan builds a foundation in the essence and subtle energies of the body. It therefore prepares the way for the more difficult stage of transforming the state of your consciousness. Once this has been achieved to a sufficient level, it is time to begin moving towards the state of 'conscious emptiness' that many other systems may begin with. Alongside this, it is closely linked to the auxiliary practices of Qi Gong and associated arts that most people looking at Daoism will have encountered.

Some may argue that Daoist Nei Dan must be more basic than other methods and therefore less powerful since it does not begin at the state of emptiness many other systems begin from, but this is its greatest strength. Rather than try to take beginners through a very difficult and generally frustrating process of trying to silence their incessantly active mind, it gradually leads them towards this state through a systematic process of working with increasingly subtle energies which bring a tangible guide to the process. I began with emptiness-based sitting practices when I was younger and struggled to attain anywhere near the correct state of mind. As I began to move into alchemical methods, I found that the step-by-step approach of working first with my body, then my energy system and finally

the spirit enabled me to grasp this state of stillness which had previously been so elusive. Figure 1.2 shows how this concept works. A solid base is built in the early stages of working with Jing; from here a practitioner works to regulate the nature of their Qi and then finally this leads them into work with the Shen. This 'pyramid' of development is the systematic path of movement towards direct comprehension of the divine state of Dao (道).

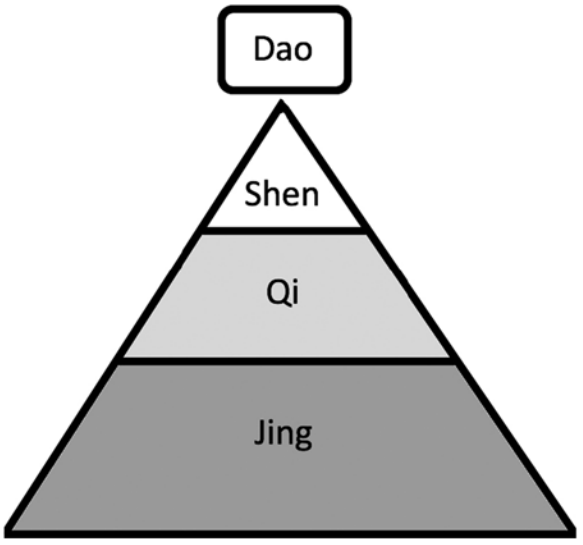


Figure 1.2: The Pyramid of Progression Through the Three Treasures

ATTAINING GONG

The Chinese character Gong (功) is shown in Figure 1.3. It is generally translated as meaning the attainment of skill through effort. This is the character that appears as a part of such terms as Qi Gong and Nei Dan Gong.



Figure 1.3: Gong

The key thing to understand with the concept of Gong is that when we first begin we do not have it. Gong is not something we do; it is something we achieve. For example, Qi Gong does not refer to the slow-moving exercises many people practise; it refers to the skill, gained over time, of controlling one's internal energy. There are various ways to do this, but only an expert can actually be said to have attained Qi Gong. Nei Dan is the same in that when we begin we are practising a form of sitting meditation, but only when we have become proficient at this art will we have attained Nei Dan Gong, the skill of attaining the internal elixir which has been formed over time. It is important that we keep this in mind when we practise as we must remember that just because we go through the various practices and exercises that we have been taught, this does not mean we have achieved the levels we are aiming for. Too many people learn some simple breathing exercises and then a week later call themselves Qi Gong teachers. This is a problem because they have not taken the time to practise and absorb the movements until they have really attained Qi Gong – mastery of their own internal energy. Nei Dan must be treated in the same way: it must be engaged with, practised and internalized over a period of many years until a person has begun to understand exactly what the internal elixir training is all about. When they have attained true Nei Dan Gong, they will have practised for long enough to fully integrate the training into their being.

In this book I am outlining the principles and practices for the early stages of Daoist alchemical meditation. These are the foundation practices of converting the body and awakening the internal fire that is required within the lower abdomen. Please remember that we are aiming for the attainment of Gong – true skill – which takes time. I have outlined a process that can take a long time to perfect, so I invite you to try out the practices, establish your own practice and work towards the stage of having achieved Nei Dan Gong.

DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF DAOISM

As well as there being different forms of meditation, there are also various ways in which Daoism has been interpreted. As time has passed, the Daoist tradition has gone through various evolutions into different forms. These transformations have been according to the beliefs and cultural norms of the time, although within each era certain groups have adhered to different versions of Daoism. Although the history of Daoism is actually quite

complex, we can simplify it somewhat by dividing Daoism into four main segments. These are as follows:

- *The shamanic era of the esoteric Wu (巫) people.* These were the original healers and mystics of ancient, tribal Chinese society. Although the term 'Daoism' had not yet come into use, it is clear through study of ancient Chinese documents that the Wu people were the predecessors of Daoism in its modern form. The shamanistic Wu people lived as part of the land, and perhaps their key philosophy, which was carried forth through the ages, was the close connection that humankind has with the powers of Heaven above and Earth below.

- *Philosophical Daoism and the teachings of Laozi (老子).* Although the *Yi Jing* (易經) or *Classic of Change* had been in circulation for several ages, the *Dao De Jing* (道德經) or the *Classic of the Virtue of the Way*, which is attributed to the great sage Laozi, is generally heralded as the beginning of Daoism in its modern form. Laozi laid down the key philosophical tenets of Wu Wei (無為) (non-governing) and Pu (樸) (simplicity) which form the basis of much of Daosim. The focus of meditation at this stage is on Zuo Wang (坐忘) (sitting and forgetting) rather than alchemical meditation.

- *Esoteric or alchemical Daoism.* The evolution of Daoism brought it in line with energetic practices such as Dao Yin (which goes back to the Wu people) as well as the philosophy of external alchemical practices. Here we see the beginning of a full system of Daoist practices being born; these include Qi Gong, Nei Gong (內功), Nei Dan Gong, the internal martial arts and various medicinal practices.

- *Religious and ceremonial Daoism.* Although originally Daoism was against any form of structured religion or hierarchy, the evolution of the tradition brought it in line with other spiritual beliefs being practised at this time. Temples were built, monastic lifestyle was incorporated into Daoism and various gods and deities began to be worshipped. Ceremonial practices and ritual were added to Daoist training and a hierarchy of priests was put in charge of the tradition. This is the most common form of Daoism which people will encounter when they visit the various holy sites and mountains of China.

It is important to understand the various stages of development that Daoism has been through in order to see exactly where each practice sits. It is also because every teacher you encounter will teach from the standpoint of one or more of these different forms of Daoism. I personally draw practices from and teach according to the second and third forms of Daoism, although a small amount of influence comes from Daoism's roots. This means that philosophical and esoteric/alchemical Daoism are my key areas of study. This is supported with some practices which I believe come from the shamanic Wu era, although the lack of historical records makes it difficult to understand exactly how much these practices have altered over time. Few of my practices come from the most modern version of Daoism, which is religious and ceremonial. I am not against this form of Daoism; I have just never studied it. Consequently, the teachings in this book (and indeed any of my books) have little to do with religious Daoism. Rather than seeking entrance into the various levels of Heaven discussed in religious Daoism, the alchemical methods outlined in this book aim to take a person towards elevation of consciousness, a way of being removed from the distortions of acquired mind, and ultimately to direct connection with the non-definable state known simply as Dao.

THE CONGENITAL AND THE ACQUIRED

In order to understand Daoist alchemy, we must first understand two terms. The first is Xian Tian (先天), which is often translated as meaning pre-Heaven or simply as congenital. The second term is Hou Tian (後天), which is translated as post-Heaven or acquired. Throughout this book I will use the terms congenital and acquired as I have seen how much confusion these two terms can cause for those not familiar with the Chinese language.

The congenital state of all phenomena within existence is to be still. At this stage there is the potential for existence, but it is the movement of the acquired that causes the potential of the congenital to move into the manifestation of reality. According to Daoist thought, every facet of the world in which we live was born from the stillness of the congenital. All life began this way and will return to this stillness upon death. This is known as 'the return of the myriad things to the source'. It is movement that generates life and the various cycles which life goes through. Anything that moves is known in Daoism as being in an acquired state. To massively simplify alchemical teachings, the aim is to work initially with the acquired energetic substances within our body and take them back to their congenital

state through seeking stillness. This is known as 'returning to the source' or 'reversing the course'.

Those familiar with my previous books will no doubt already understand the concept of the Daoist process of creation. This is a simple way of understanding the movement from the potential of the congenital state towards the manifestation of the acquired world. This takes place as Dao gives birth to reality via the window of Wuji (無極). This is a process summarized in the common Daoist diagram shown in Figure 1.4.

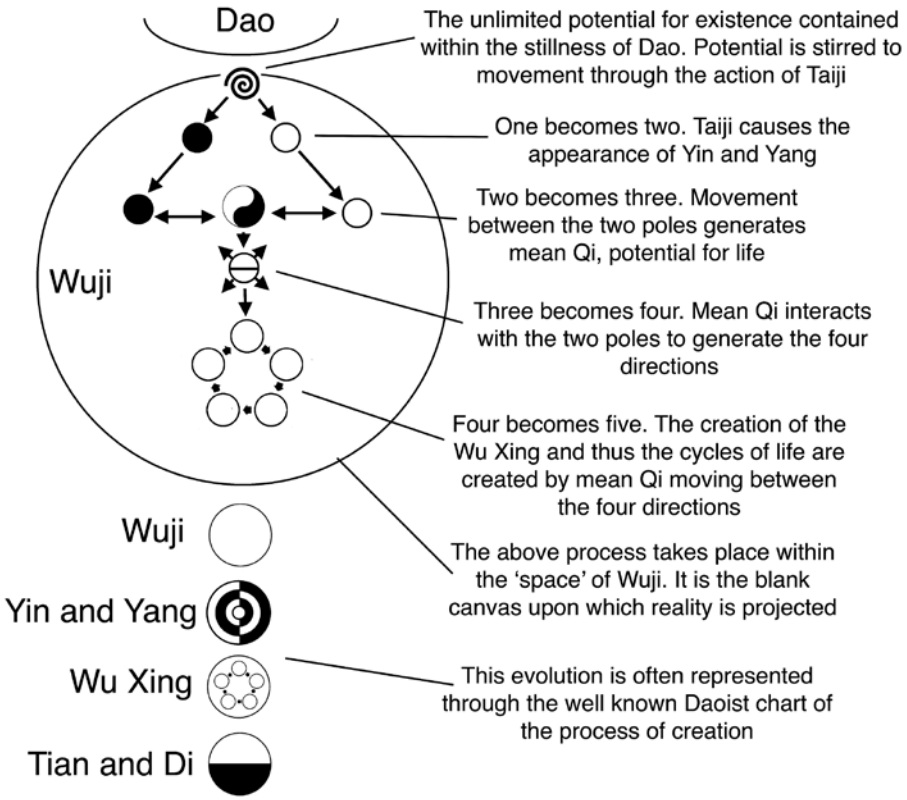

Dao
The unlimited potential for existence contained within the stillness of Dao. Potential is stirred to movement through the action of Taiji
One becomes two. Taiji causes the appearance of Yin and Yang
Two becomes three. Movement between the two poles generates mean Qi, potential for life
Wuji
Three becomes four. Mean Qi interacts with the two poles to generate the four directions
Four becomes five. The creation of the Wu Xing and thus the cycles of life are created by mean Qi moving between the four directions
Wuji
The above process takes place within the 'space' of Wuji. It is the blank canvas upon which reality is projected
Yin and Yang
Wu Xing
This evolution is often represented through the well known Daoist chart of the process of creation
Tian and Di

Figure 1.4: Summary of the Daoist Process of Creation

The upper chart shows the formation of existence from the congenital stillness of Dao. From out of the stillness comes the spiralling force known as Taiji (太极). This force serves as the catalyst for the division of stillness into the two poles of Yin (陰) and Yang (陽). This is the beginning of the movement towards the acquired state of being known as existence. This process of creation of the two poles of Yin and Yang, known collectively as the Liang Yi (兩儀), manifested macrocosmically at the formation of

the cosmos and manifests microcosmically whenever new life comes into being. Each and every one of us went through this process when we were conceived. As we move through the various stages of evolution discussed in this theory, we develop into human beings and develop consciousness. On another level, this process is also repeated each and every time we have a thought of any kind. According to this ancient wisdom tradition, each and every movement of our mind repeats the very process of creation that formed both the universe and each life form living within it. This is an important aspect of Daoist philosophy; understanding this is important when attempting to move beyond the surface layers of alchemical training. Within Daoism our thoughts do not come from our brain. The brain is simply a processor for our thoughts which are instead born from the stillness at the centre of our own innate consciousness. As these thoughts emerge from the stillness, Dao, they move through the various layers of consciousness and mind until they produce the emotionally driven acquired thought processes that dictate our actions within life.

The Daoist classics say that 'from the two came three', which is the formation of mean Qi. The term 'mean' is referring to the sum of two things rather than the emotional state of being nasty! This is mean as in the mathematical average of two elements. Mean Qi is formed from the interaction of Yin and Yang, and essentially gives us a sliding scale between the two extremes. If Yin and Yang are black and white, mean Qi is the shade of grey that exists between the two. All life is formed from mean Qi of some kind. The countless manifestations of Yin and Yang intermingling through mean Qi were mapped out diagrammatically through the theory of the *Yi Jing* and the Gua (卦) or 'hexagrams'. These are explored in greater detail in Chapters 11 and 12.

'From three came four', and thus mean Qi moves between the two poles to generate the four directions we usually associate with the four compass points. This is the equivalent of the formation of the three-dimensional world. This is the stage upon which the movements of life can take place. The three-dimensional world gives us existence and a platform upon which life can be played out.

'From four comes five', which is the formation of the Wu Xing (五行), more commonly known as the 'five elements' or the 'five elemental processes'. These are various interactions of mean Qi within the space of the four directions which give us the various cycles and processes of life. In the human body this is the stage of interaction between mind and body that goes on to form the acquired spirit. The refractory process by which

spirit moves into the Wu Xing is both our biggest obstacle in Nei Dan training and also our biggest tool when working with our nature.

Note that in the chart in Figure 1.4 everything is encompassed by the space of Wuji, which literally means 'without limits' or 'without extremities'. The limits of extremities referred to here are the extreme poles of the Liang Yi, Yin and Yang. Since they are non-existent in the state of Wuji, there is no existence. No manifestation, only potential. This is the extreme stillness and space that surrounds us and permeates all of life. Although we spend the majority of our life focused upon the various tangible objects that fill our existence, it is actually the 'potential filled stillness' of Wuji that we are trying to contact through meditation practice. Life is essentially a vast expansion of stillness – Wuji – which is broken up through small pockets of movement that we call physical matter. We generally only interact with the 'breaks' in this stillness while missing the beauty of contacting the potential for all manifestation that surrounds us.

The process discussed above is vitally important for our Nei Dan training as it shows us exactly how the congenital forms into the acquired. This is the natural course of life and the process that we all inevitably move through as we are born, age and eventually die. Our path through this process is known as Ming (命). When alchemical teachings tell us to 'reverse the course', it is this process we are trying to move back through. We are trying to return the five to the four to the three to the two to the one. In brief, the five of Wu Xing is stilled when we manage to regulate the five spirits and the processes of energetic movement that will return us to a state of inner balance. Then the four will return to stillness, meaning that the three-dimensional world will cease to be a part of our framework of reality. At this stage we are able to slip back through the kinks in the false world of tangibility to access Wuji and the great stillness. It is within this vast space that the more complex work of regulating and recombining Yin and Yang can take place, which will eventually lead us towards Dao and spiritual elevation.

I would encourage anybody who wishes to begin serious practice of Nei Dan to become familiar with this theoretical framework. It is derived from an original chart attributed to the semi-mythological Daoist, Chen Tuan (陳摶). Only when all of existence and the various manifestations that take place within it can be understood according to this concept will 'returning to the source' become a possibility. It is the coming together of the subconscious mind through practice and the conscious mind through study of theory that we build the focus necessary for deep alchemical training.

INTRODUCTION TO NATURE AND THE PATH OF LIFE

Two terms that are integral to Daoist Nei Dan are Xing (性) and Ming (命). If we can understand Xing and Ming, then we have an excellent philosophical guideline for our training. Let us look at each term individually.

Xing is generally translated as meaning 'your nature', but in fact, as with many words in the Chinese language, its meaning is actually multi-layered. Xing can refer to the state of your own inner nature with regard to what level you have cultivated your consciousness, but it can also refer to the connection you have with the nature of the external world. In the beginning it is understood that human beings are born with a mostly 'blank slate'. Although you will have a default emotional standpoint from which to experience life, given to you by your family as well as the movement of the planets and stars at the point of your conception, you are born pretty much free from acquired mind. The world at this stage is one big potential experience; as you develop, these experiences form the mental lens through which you view the world. The original state of being is known as the congenital, whereas that which you develop is known as the acquired. In order to avoid confusion of terms (as everything in Daoism can be classified according to congenital and acquired), I refer to the original state as consciousness and the acquired state as mind. In Chapter 2 the relationship between consciousness and mind is explored in greater detail. How these two are balanced and how they relate to each other essentially makes up your Xing, your nature. All forms of meditation serve as a vehicle to examine and ultimately transform your Xing in one way or another.

At the highest stages of practice, the ideal state of being is to end your own Xing. When your own nature has reached a point of stillness, often explained in Daoism as being a state of 'no self', you will unite with the Xing of the macrocosm – a state known as 'following the Xing of Heaven'. This is the stage of dissolving your current sense of self into the stillness of Wuji, which causes mind to peel back to reveal true congenital consciousness.

Ming is generally translated as your 'fate' or 'destiny'. This is a very simplified understanding of the multi-layered concept of Ming. For training at Qi Gong level it may be enough to understand your Ming as your destiny, but for the more in-depth practice of Nei Dan Gong we must delve deeper into this term. I generally translate Ming as meaning 'your path from birth to death' and it can be represented as shown in Figure 1.5.

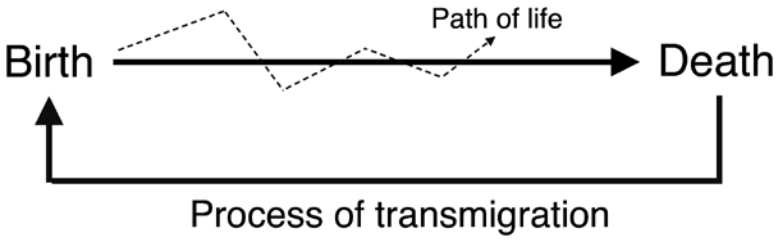


Figure 1.5: The Line of Ming

The thick black arrow shows the direct line that a person is supposed to take from the point of their birth through to their death, which is essentially a point of return to 'the source' – the change of movement back into stillness. This path is said to be at least 120 years in length for human beings and even longer for some people. This pre-ordained length of Ming path is dictated by the quality of the Jing or essence a person is given at the point of their birth. Providing a person is not born with a deficiency of essence, for whatever reason, they should live to the absolute minimum of 120 years in age. If they do not make it to this age, then in Daoism they are said to have died young! You are also supposed to live the vast majority of these 120-plus years in good health and with a vibrant mind. Many sects of Daoism, including alchemical Daoists, found that by working with the quality of their essence through the internal arts, they could extend this Ming line even further, resulting in amazing feats of longevity and even, reportedly, immortality. Underneath the thick black arrow is a grey arrow showing the return to source that ultimately results in rebirth. This is the process of transmigration that is part of the vast majority of Eastern spiritual traditions.

Rebirth in Daoism varies between different sects. The more religion-based schools of Daoism talk of a judgement process and a Heaven much like those in Christian beliefs. Alchemical and esoteric schools instead look at the transmigration of the ten souls. These are the three Yang souls, which collectively make up the ethereal spirit of the Hun (魂), and the seven Yin souls, which contribute to the existence of the more corporeal spirit known as the Po (魄). The Yang souls are eternal and passed on into the next existence; they are either fragmented or consolidated, depending upon your level of attainment at death. The Yin souls divide and return to the Earth where they form part of the collective spiritual pool that is drawn upon as more people are born. This process obviously only takes place

for those who have not reached the lofty heights of spiritual immortality through their practice.

The dotted line in Figure 1.5 shows the 'path of life'. This is a representation of the journey that people take along the line from birth to death. In the majority of cases it is said that people do not run their life in line with their destiny or the will of Heaven. They are out of sync with this aspect of their Ming. A major aspect of Daoist philosophy is the ethos of 'going with the flow' and finding the path of least resistance through life. This ideal path is the path that is in line with the will of Heaven and the line along which it is most fortuitous to travel. The dotted line in Figure 1.5 shows a common way for people to live their life, zigzagging across the will of Heaven and only interjecting with their true Ming line for brief periods. Because they are out of sync with their life purpose, most people are blissfully unaware of these brief 'Ming connections' and so move back off the line. The further off this line we travel, the more we use up our essence, which is closely linked to our Ming. As this essence runs out, we experience increasing periods of imbalance, disease and eventually death. The connection between our essence and our Ming can be seen through a study of the acupuncture points of the body. Ming Men (命門) (Du 4) sits in the small of the lower back beneath the second lumbar vertebra. It translates as the 'gateway to our Ming' and it is here that our essence is said to reside. Through manipulation of this point we can affect the body's essence as well as the connected energetic functions of the Kidneys. Esoteric sects of Chinese medical practice also claim that this point can be used to change the connection that a person has to their 'line of Ming'.

The connection between our essence, our Ming and the process we take through life also brings our own physical health into the equation. Since our essence is connected to our physical health, this means that our body must be in a good state in order for our Ming to be balanced. The body is the vehicle through which we experience life and with which we travel along the path of life. If our vehicle fails us, then we will not get to the end of our journey. It is for this reason that Daoism always stresses a lot of body work and the principles of Yang Sheng Fa (养生法), which translates literally as 'life-nourishing techniques' or, more basically, 'healthy living'. Obviously, people are born in different states, with different strengths and weaknesses. Some are born disabled, others develop incurable weaknesses through injuries and so on. This does not mean they cannot work with their Ming; each of us must simply work on our health and well-being to the best of our abilities and within whatever limitations we may have.

Xing and Ming are important to understand and take into consideration because true alchemical practices must aim to bring Xing and Ming together. Only through the linking of the two can we begin to reach a state of transcendence. This means that Daoism differs from some other meditation systems. Many other methods focus solely upon Xing to the exclusion of Ming, whereas more tantric or energetic practices may focus almost solely upon Ming. If Xing is cultivated on its own, then the practitioner's consciousness may reach high levels of development, but their body and health will likely fail them. The vehicle will not allow them to move far enough through their life path to actualize their full potential. If Ming is cultivated alone, then it is possible for good health and even some low-level spiritual abilities to be attained, but there will be a poor level of ethical understanding present. The mind is still dominant over consciousness, meaning that the temptation to misuse power will be very strong. This is a very common issue in many Daoist sects that focus solely upon Ming-based practices. Figure 1.6 shows the necessary coming together of Xing and Ming.

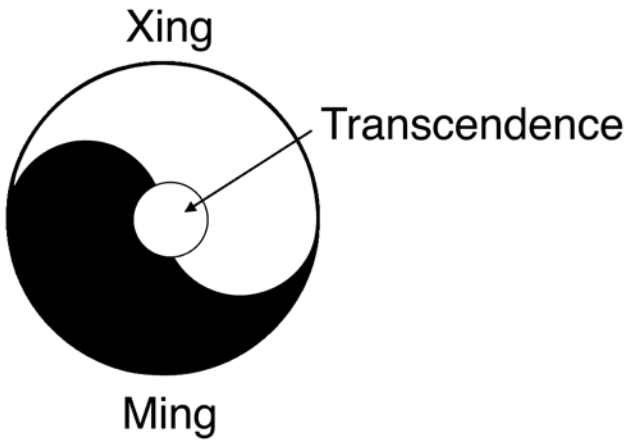


Figure 1.6: Xing and Ming

Because of the aim to bring Xing and Ming together, Daoism produced arts that worked on both the mind and the body. The foundation is built in Ming, meaning that the body's physical and energetic health is restored and maintained, and from this platform direct work on Xing is carried out.

THE THREE TREASURES

Even a cursory flick through any book on Daoism, Chinese medicine or Qi Gong will reveal the terms Jing, Qi and Shen. These are collectively known as the San Bao (三寶), the three treasures. Generally they are translated as meaning essence (Jing), energy (Qi) and spirit (Shen). They are the key 'substances' utilized in practices such as Qi Gong, Nei Gong or Nei Dan. Although it is enough for basic-level Qi Gong practice to have a very rudimentary understanding of the Jing, Qi and Shen, Nei Dan practices requires a more in-depth understanding of the nature of the three treasures.

As with everything else in Daoism, the three treasures can be divided into the categories of congenital and acquired. The congenital aspects of Jing, Qi and Shen exist prior to human life; they are the stillness that becomes a life form once they are manifested through movement. If we look back to the process of creation, we can see that congenital Jing, Qi and Shen exist within the great potential of Wuji as undivided and un-manifest energies. It is only when they begin to move that the process of the creation of life begins to take place. Once they are in movement, they are in an acquired state. This is the difference between congenital and acquired Jing, Qi and Shen. What creates this movement from stillness in the first place? This is unknown; it is the action of Dao, via the spiralling force of Taiji. The concept of the movement from congenital to acquired Jing, Qi and Shen is discussed in greater detail when we look at the process of entering stillness, but for now it is enough to know that the aim of alchemy is to work with these three treasures and return them to a congenital state. We seek to return them to stillness in order to discover their congenital aspects. In this way we discover the very ingredients of creation that we wish to utilize in order to move towards a state of transcendence.

Let us first explore simply the meanings of Jing, Qi and Shen. Even without dividing them into their congenital and acquired aspects, we must have some background knowledge on these three aspects of human existence.

The first thing to understand is that all three are simply forms of movement. Daoist classics hint that all of life is made up of light, sound and movement. Various analogies involving colours, noises and directions of movement appear throughout Daoist scripture, as well as the ultimate truth that the course of the three treasures, and thus all of existence, lies in stillness. This movement takes the form of a series of vibrational patterns, which then go on to generate the various layers of information required for life to come into being and go through the various processes that lead

it back to the source. If we wished to simplify Daoism to the bare basics, we might say that if something vibrates, it manifests; if it is still, it returns to the realm of potential. The information contained within these various waves is then interpreted by the brain into the experience of reality that we are currently having right now.

THE BASICS OF SAN BAO FOR NEI DAN

Jing is generally translated as meaning 'essence' in classical Chinese medical thought. It is the aspect of our energetic matrix that serves as both our fuel and the blueprint for our physical make-up. In many contemporary Qi Gong books you will often see Jing translated as meaning sexual fluid, but this is an oversimplification. Sexual fluids are one aspect born out of Jing, but there are many other aspects of human existence governed by Jing. Jing is not actually a substance, but rather the last possible point that the cosmos can condense to before it becomes a substance; it is the energetic vibration that sits behind matter. According to Daoism, life is made up of different vibrating energies; depending upon their particular frequency, they fall under a different heading. Furthest from human life are the vibration frequencies of Dao and Heaven; below this exist the realms of consciousness or 'Shen', and below this again sit the subtle energetic realms of Qi. If the frequency of Qi decreases, then it becomes Jing, and finally any further lowering of frequency results in the formation of matter: existence. Life is a sliding spectrum of vibration from the ethereal realms of spirit down into the dense physicality of the world with which we can interact via the five senses.

This can be quite confusing for many beginners in the internal arts, and so you will find the analogy of steam, water and ice being used. Although they are actually one and the same, steam, water and ice can convert into each other if they are warmed or cooled. Like steam, Shen is ethereal and lacking physical form. Like water, Qi is fluid and flows through the world. Like ice, Jing is dense but always on the verge of transforming back into water, Qi.

Jing is our essence, gifted to us at birth. The quality of our Jing depends upon many things, including the health and age of our family line, the time at which we were conceived, our astrological circumstances and our previous existences. These factors combine to give us a base essence that is to serve as our fuel for the whole of our life. It is for this reason that so many Daoist texts discuss the importance of protecting the Jing and its associated

organ, the Kidneys. Our Jing is used up over the course of our daily life through several key processes; this is unavoidable, but what is within our control is how we manage our lifestyle in order to determine how fast or slow this Jing is used up. A large part of classical Daoist study of health and longevity was based around the study of Jing, its transformations and how they may be managed.

FEMALE JING

The first thing that Jing does is control our life processes. Numerology was very important to the Daoists, who realized that Jing in women was closely linked to the number seven. What this means is that as the Jing governs the growth and development of a woman's body, it causes her to go through life cycles that are seven years long. At each of these seven-year cycle points, she reaches a certain energetic milestone that is a manifestation of the numerological essence of her Jing. Various classical Daoist texts give us interpretations of what takes place at these seven-year milestones with regard to a woman's growth and development. These are as follows:

- At age seven a girl has strong Kidney energy and thus high levels of Jing. She should have an abundance of energy and be developing healthily. Her ability to learn is very strong, which helps in her process of education that is essential at this time.
- At age 14 a girl begins to menstruate through the movements of Jing and its manifestation into menstrual blood. The female body begins to develop into a more womanly shape and she is able to conceive a child. This is due to the natural movement of the congenital meridians at this age.
- At age 21 a girl's Jing has completed the development of her female energy. The Kidney energy is full at this stage, making her an adult in the sense of her energetic body. The wisdom teeth should appear at this age.
- At age 28 a woman has reached the peak of her Jing developmental processes. It is at this age that her muscles and tendons are naturally at their optimum strength.
- At age 35 a woman begins to move past the peak of her essence into a period of decline. The Jing is starting to move her past the stage of growth and so weakening of the body can begin to occur.

- At age 42 a woman's Jing is beginning to strongly decline. Her teeth begin to weaken, along with her organs, particularly the organs involved in digestive processes, which means that it becomes easier for her to gain weight.
- At age 49 a woman's Jing declines to such a point that she enters menopause. Her monthly cycle begins to end, together with her menstrual flow. She can no longer conceive and she is said to have completed her Heavenly cycle of seven times seven, the numerological peak of the Jing's developmental power. The menopause is known as the start of the 'second spring' in Daoism. This is a time of great spiritual potential for women and a natural time when her mind should begin to still.

The different transformations we can see taking place in a woman's body at these different ages are a result of the movement and actions of the Jing. Like oil burning up in an old-fashioned lamp, it causes the flame to grow, glow brightly and then begin to sputter and finally go out. It is one major goal of Nei Dan to work with and preserve the flow of the Jing in order to slow the natural process outlined above.

Jing also governs a person's constitutional health because our guardian energy, known as our Wei Qi, is partially formed from our Jing. This field of energy extends out from the body, protecting us from energetic influences that may make us sick. As our Jing weakens, it can cause our constitutional health and our energetic 'immune system' to grow weaker. It is for this reason that a younger woman will be more able to fend off disease than an older woman, providing that she is healthy, of course. This function of Jing is the same for both men and women although women's Jing will be periodically weaker when they are menstruating, meaning that they will be more likely to catch illnesses and feel the cold or heat when they are at this stage of their monthly cycle. Men's Jing does not fluctuate according to a monthly cycle like this, so their constitution will be more constant.

MALE JING

Like women, men's life cycles are governed for the most part by their Jing. Whereas women's Jing causes them to go through seven-year cycles of development, male growth and development is based upon eight-year cycles. The numerology of the Jing for men connects them to the Ba Gua (八卦) energetics of the surrounding environment, whereas women

are governed by the astrological energies of the cosmos that work to the number seven. This is shown in Figure 1.7.

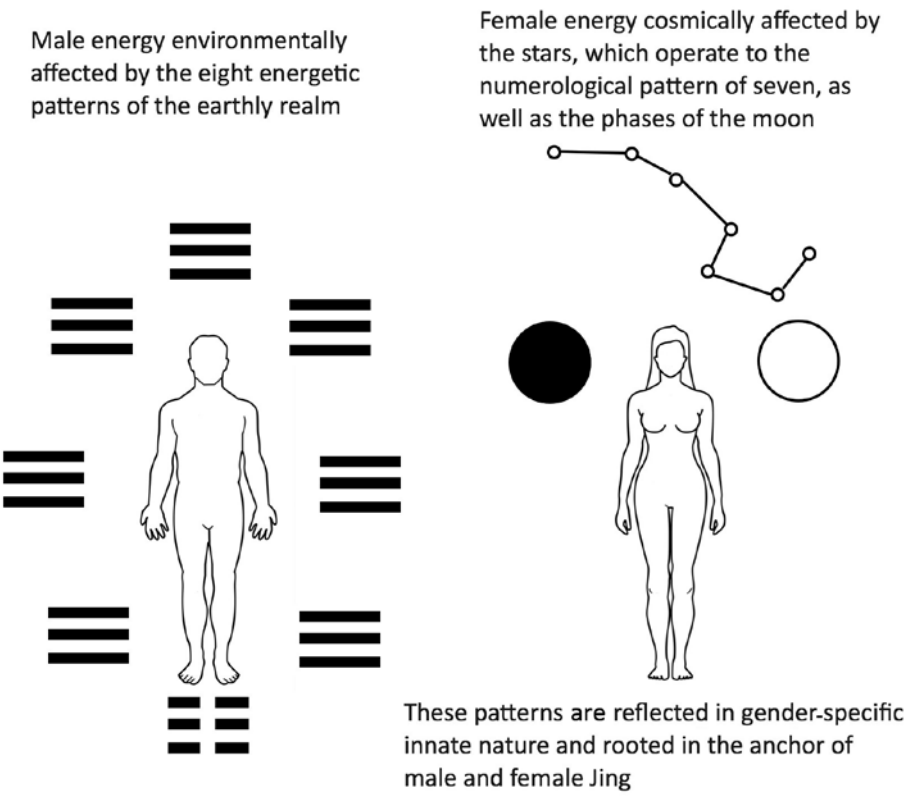

Male energy environmentally affected by the eight energetic patterns of the earthly realm
Female energy cosmically affected by the stars, which operate to the numerological pattern of seven, as well as the phases of the moon
These patterns are reflected in gender-specific innate nature and rooted in the anchor of male and female Jing

Figure 1.7: Numerological Correspondences for Men and Women

What this means is that men are strongly governed by the Earthly realms of Jing and Qi but are naturally limited in their ability to connect with the spiritual realm of Shen. It can take a great deal of inner cultivation for men to elevate their spirit to the state of being able to communicate with the divine, whereas women find this fairly simple once they have solidified their root within the Earthly realm, which is often their initial challenge.

As Jing causes men to work through eight-year developmental phases, it has the following effects upon their growth:

- At age eight a boy's Jing is strong and working towards his growth.
- At age 16 a boy's Jing has begun to develop more strongly. His physical body is beginning to develop into that of a man as the Qi causes his shoulders to strengthen and his muscles to grow.

- At age 24 a male has become a man. His boyish structure is fully gone and he has completed his physical growth.
- At age 32 a male is said to have reached his energetic peak. His muscles and bones are fully developed and his strength is at its natural peak.
- At age 40 a male's Jing has naturally declined to the stage at which his hair begins to thin, his skin begins to wrinkle and his muscles begin to weaken.
- At age 48 a male is moving strongly into a period of Jing decline.
- At age 56 a male is beginning to physically weaken and it is at this age that the strength of his internal energy becomes particularly important to him. If his internal energy is strong, then he will maintain his health as he ages.
- At age 64 a male has reached his numerological peak of eight times eight. This is the culmination of the developmental process of the Jing. The weakening of the physical body at this stage means that all of a man's emphasis for training should switch to cultivation of the energetic body and the spirit. It is at this age that it is easiest for males to fully express their innate spiritual potential, providing that they have not allowed the acquired mind to fully bury their innate congenital nature.

Male essence is not involved in any kind of menstrual process and so is not lost on a monthly basis, but instead is used up largely through excessive ejaculation and unhealthy living. The difficulty for men is that their nature is greatly dependent upon their instinctual drives, and Jing is largely responsible for this. The governance of drives and base desires is rooted in the nature of the Jing. For men, this is often the greatest hurdle to any internal practices.

QI

Qi is often rather loosely translated as meaning 'life-force' or 'energy'. Although this term may be adequate for basic-level Qi Gong practice, we should look a little deeper into its meaning with regard to Nei Dan training. The term Qi is very difficult to define directly; as well as referring to the streams of energy that flow through our body, it also refers to abstract states

or qualities that are generally beyond definition. For example, the general 'glow' or lack of 'lustre' in somebody's state of being would be attributed to the quality of Qi present. Although this is obviously linked on some level to the flows of 'life-force' through their body, there is another more ethereal quality involved here. A location has a quality of Qi to it, along with a feeling or emotion, and these entities do not rely on meridian streams of energy flowing through them. It is for this reason that I define Qi as 'information' in my writing. Though far from perfect as a definition, it does enable me to work more concretely with my internal environment during my training. 'Information' may lack much of the artistry or mystique of many other writers' interpretation of Qi, but it works in the framework I utilize in my practice. Within the body, the lines of flowing Qi information make up the meridian system as well as various pulses and waves of information that flow through us, carrying out important psychological and physiological roles.

Qi is born from the Jing within the human body during the course of our life and is greatly affected by the movements of our mind through the actions of our Shen. It is the energetic manifestation of both the quality of our health and the state of our mind. It is the link between body and mind that creates the holistic nature of human existence.

In Chapter 2, various aspects of Qi flow within the body are discussed in detail. An understanding of the fluxes and flows of Qi through the body is essential when attempting to comprehend Daoist Nei Dan practice.

SHEN

The highest-frequency manifestation of the San Bao is the Shen, our spirit. The model of our Shen that is generally used within Daoist thought is the model of the five spirits, the Wu Shen (五神). These five aspects of human mind are known as the Hun (魂), the Shen (神), the Zhi (志), the Po (魄) and the Yi (意). These five spirits interrelate with each other as shown in Figure 1.8 to give us the movements of human intellect, direction and thought.

The two Yang spirits are the Hun and the Shen, which manifest the elemental energies of Wood and Fire respectively. The Yin spirits are the Zhi and the Po, which manifest the Water and Metal elemental energies. In the centre sits the Yi, which moves between various degrees of Yin and Yang depending upon its interactions and influences from the other spirits. This corresponds with the five-elemental Wu Xing theory, which places the elements as shown in Figure 1.9.

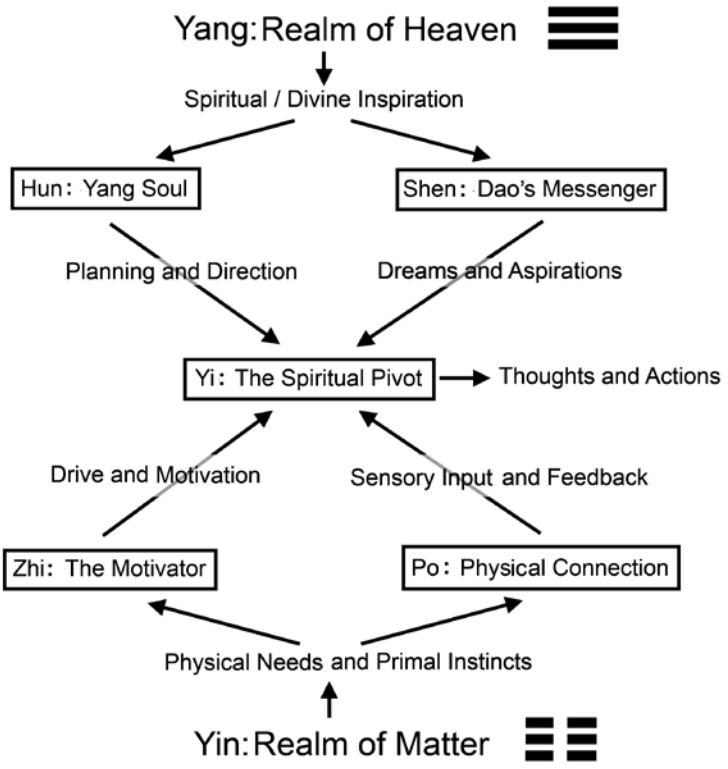


Figure 1.8: The Wu Shen

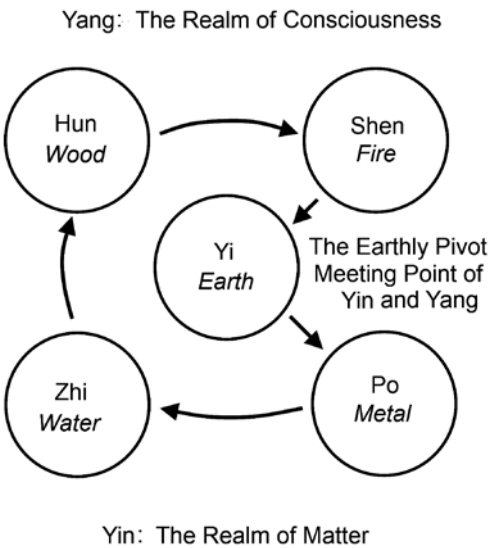


Figure 1.9: The Wu Xing

Human beings sit between the two poles of extreme Yang and Yin, which are manifested as Heaven and Earth. In the case of the human mind, these two great poles represent divine inspiration, which is said to belong to the realm of Heaven, and primal instincts, which are the psychological aspect of the realm of Earth. In order to survive in this world, we require a balanced relationship to these two poles and it is the inter-relationship of the five spirits that dictates how balanced this relationship is. This is the basis for the formation of Xing and that which divides our true consciousness from our acquired mind.

The Hun

The Hun is considered the Yang aspect of the human soul. There are classically said to be three Hun: the Yang Hun, the Yin Hun and the Ren (人) or human Hun. The Yang Hun is said to be given to us at birth from the Heavens; it carries with it the collective consciousness of all humanity down through the ages and is the aspect of spirit which, when tapped into, can give access to all human thought and knowledge. This aspect of Hun is considered to be 'on loan' to us for the duration of our life; when we die, the Yang Hun 'returns to the source', taking with it all of the experiences we have had during our life. The Yin Hun comes from original spirit; it is an aspect of the Yuan Shen (元神) and, like the Yang Hun, returns to its place of origin upon death. It is this aspect of the Hun that is said to carry with it the information from previous lives. According to Daoist thought, the Yin Hun is the layer of Hun that transmigrates. Note that in some traditions of Daoism the Yin Hun is also divided into various parts, each coming from the Hun of a previous existence; in these traditions there is no direct reincarnation from individual to individual, but rather a composite Hun made up of various interconnected previous existences. The third and final aspect of Hun is the Ren Hun which is given to a person by their parents. The Ren Hun contains a spiritual imprint from the soul of your parents and the family lineage which comes from them. It is this aspect of Hun that strongly connects family members with each other; it seems to be particularly strong in twins, who are often able to intuitively understand each other on a subconscious level through communication of the Hun.

These Hun work as one unit to communicate with the realm of Heaven. They then work to give plans and direction to the Yi, which processes the actions of the Hun. If the Hun is weak, then a person will not be able to formulate any kind of direction for themselves. The Hun are rooted in

the organ of the Liver and are particularly active during sleep when they communicate the divine information of the realm of Heaven to us through imagery and symbolic dreams.

The Shen

It can be quite confusing when first trying to understand the concept of Shen. This is because Shen can refer to two different entities. On a simple level, Shen is the overall general name for the human spirit, but it can also mean a single element of the human spirit, as in this case.

The Shen resides within the 'orifices of the Heart' and is said to be the key communicator with the Heavenly realm. It is the messenger of Dao that brings aspirations and life-dreams into a person's mind. Those with weak Shen will lack the ability to imagine or have high-minded goals. If the Shen is un-rooted, then it can cause mania and psychiatric illness as too much information pours through from the Heavenly realm without the positive filtering aspect of the Shen to protect the fragile mind.

The Zhi

The Zhi is the spirit of will power. It is the aspect of the human mind that provides the drive and motivation to see a task through. The plans of the Hun and the dreams of the Shen rely upon the motivating force of the Zhi to ensure that they come into being. Those with weak Zhi will find that although they may have grand schemes, they rarely seem to see them through.

The Zhi is an Earthly aspect of spirit rooted in the Yin energies of the planet. Although it is not directly in communication with the Heavenly realm, it does fall under its influence and a second aspect of the Zhi is that it is, in part, the 'will of Heaven'. This does not translate directly into the term fate or destiny, but there are parallels. The concept of destiny as a fixed path through life does not come into Daoism; rather, there are flows and eddies of life paths which move within the realm of existence. These paths are manifested from the spirit of Heaven and rooted in the realm of Earth. It is these flows upon which run the paths of an individual's Ming. The Zhi exists as a fine balance between the will of the individual and the will of Heaven.

The connections between Ming, Jing and Zhi are absolute, and consequently all three have a close connection to the strength of the Kidneys.

The Po

The seven corporeal Po spirits work as one unit to give a person tangible connection to the Earthly realm. They are the aspects of spirit that give us an understanding of the impermanence of life and as such they are also transient in nature. Unlike their Yang counterpart, the seven Po break down on our death and return to the Yin energies of the Earth, ready to be redistributed to others on their birth. There is no immortality for the Po, which are acutely aware of their certain demise and perpetual attachment to the Earthly realm; for this they are often depicted as distraught and woe-filled spirits.

With the Hun, the Po form the second half of the human soul. The Hun attach our soul to the power of Heaven while the Po link us to the power of Earth. Whereas the Hun speak the movements of Heaven to us through dreams and symbols, the Po communicate the realm of Earth to us through tangible sensation and literal meaning. As a part of the soul, the Po may also greatly affect our dreams, but the dreaming Po gives us dreams that are very definite in their meaning. Abstract imagery does not feature within the Po's language; rather, they are the more mundane dreams that result from the literal nature of the physical world.

When the Po are divided into seven parts, they are given very interesting names as follows: Corpse Dog, Kidnapping Corpse, Dark Bird, Greedy Robber, Flying Poison, Great Poison and Rotten Lung. These names were due to the belief that, on death, each of the seven Po left the human body one day at a time as grief-stricken spirits which, one by one, began to break down into the Earth. Those who died in great sadness were said to give enough power to the Po that one or more of the seven spirits would remain on the Earth for a prolonged period as a ghostly entity. These beliefs, though not strictly relevant to alchemical practice, should be understood because they feature in many of the alchemical texts and charts.

The Yi

Sitting at the centre of Figure 1.9 is the Yi – human intellect, awareness and manifested thought patterns. The Yi is neither more Yin nor more Yang by nature; instead, it is formed from a mixture of the other four spirits. The Yi is the aspect of our mind that takes in the information from the other four spirits and does something with it. It creates thought patterns which give us a coherent understanding of the information coming to us from Heaven

above and Earth below. On its own, the Yi is responsible for very little; it requires interaction with the other spirits to have any real function. In the same way, without the Yi, the other spirits have no basis within human thought. Table 1.1 shows the main functions of the Yi when it interacts with the other spirits.

Table 1.1: Yi Interactions

Yi and Hun	Imagination, Dreaming, Planning, Direction, Mental Projection
Yi and Shen	Divine Insight, Faith, Belief, Comprehension, Understanding
Yi and Zhi	Will, Drive, Concept of Purpose, Clarity, Wisdom
Yi and Po	Feeling, Memory, Knowledge, Learning, Logic, Reasoning

The strength of a person's Yi is important because a weakness here will detach one or more of the spirits from your cognitive centre, which will result in an imbalance within your thought patterns. This will dull the mind and make advancement through Nei Dan training very difficult.

In Nei Dan there is an important stage of attempting to balance the five spirits. This is often known as 'reversing the five elements' or 'balancing the five lights' in Nei Dan schools, although in actual fact it is really only the Yi we are attempting to balance. The Earthly element aspect of the human mind must find its centre in order to enable us to progress beyond the stages of acquired spirit, and this requires work with all four of the other spirits.

THE ALCHEMICAL SAN BAO CYCLE

When a new student begins to look into a practice such as Qi Gong, they will no doubt begin with the absolute basics. They will start by looking into the concepts of Jing, Qi and Shen, and most likely remain at the level of understanding them to simply be essence, energy and spirit, which is how they are most commonly translated. This is an adequate level of knowledge for an art such as Qi Gong. A more complicated study such as Chinese medicine will most likely go further and divide the Jing, Qi and Shen into parts including Yuan Jing (元精), Yuan Qi (元氣) and Yuan Shen (元神). Looking closer at the subject in this way takes you deeper into the theory that underpins the various practices. Nei Dan is several steps up in complexity from Qi Gong and consequently our understanding of the movements of the San Bao needs to be more detailed. Figure 1.10 shows the movements of the San Bao within alchemical theory.

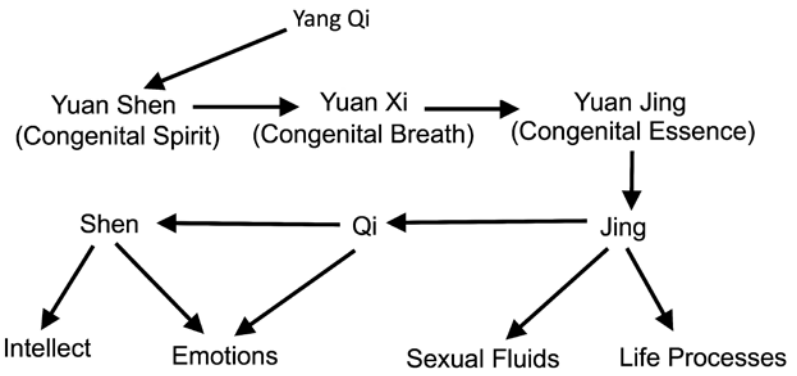


Figure 1.10: Alchemical San Bao Movements

At the top of the chart sits Yang Qi (陽氣) which is considered a highly important aspect of alchemical training. Yang Qi is the original energy born from the space of Wuji through the rotational force of Taiji. It is the very 'substance' of Heaven and the Yang which was born from original Yin. Those seeking divinity within the Daoist traditions understood that Yang Qi should be sought out because this was the true way to unite the consciousness with Heaven. It is one of the vital components when attempting to formulate the alchemical pill which is a high-level attainment within Nei Dan practice. It is important that we draw attention to the fact that the Yang Qi discussed here is different from the other form of energy also commonly known as Yang Qi, which resides within the body. The Yang Qi we naturally have within our body is a form of Qi that moves from our centre outwards and flows within the meridian system. The Yang Qi discussed in terms of alchemy is the energy of Heaven. There has been confusion over this in some alchemical schools which have mistakenly mixed medical and alchemical theory, and consequently sought to gather Yang Qi through incorrect methods.

Since Yang Qi is the energy of pure Heaven, it is also the energy of original consciousness; once this slows in frequency to the level of manifestation, it becomes Yuan Shen or 'original spirit', as shown in Figure 1.10. Yuan Shen is the undifferentiated light of illumination that exists before the five spirits of Hun, Shen, Yi, Zhi or Po refract into being. This is the true spirit of pure consciousness, the aspect of our nature that Buddhists may refer to as our innate 'Buddha nature'. This is the congenital manifestation of human consciousness.

When original spirit begins to stir into movement, it becomes Yuan Xi (元息) or 'original breath'. This is the movement of Yuan Shen as it flows

through the space between Heaven and Earth. Sometimes called the 'breath of life', this is the magical animating spirit which brings life to everything within the cosmos. If Yuan Xi did not move through us, then we would not live, and it is this breath that leaves the body upon our death and frees the various spirits from their anchoring in the physical realm. This is the original form of human Qi in alchemical teachings.

Gradually, Yuan Xi begins to condense and this forms Yuan Jing or 'original essence'. This is the form of Jing previously discussed – the Jing we are gifted upon our birth. Contained within this Jing are the seven- and eight-year cyclical patterns that will dictate our growth, development and decline over the course of our life. Profoundly, the Yuan Jing also contains the potential for Yuan Xi and Yuan Shen if it can be refined, and herein lie many of the principles of Nei Dan training once we move beyond the foundation stages.

The 'Yuan' stages of existence are still not manifest within human existence; instead, they sit in the background behind the various mechanisms of life, ensuring that all the world can come into being. Once Yuan Jing refines again, it becomes Jing, the essence with which we interact in different ways depending upon the quality of our health. This Jing governs our life processes and the functions of the body. For men in particular, it is also closely linked to our sexual fluids, which is why so much guidance on regulating sexual activity is given in Daoist alchemical teachings.

The Jing is then converted upwards within the body into Qi, and then further into the Shen which is now refracted into the five spirits discussed above. These all work to govern our body's activities and our mind as we progress through our life.

If we are to look in brief at an overview of the alchemical process of Nei Dan, it is basically to reverse the course of development outlined in Figure 1.10. We build the foundation in our body's health and then move back up this scale until we can contact the Yuan Shen and ultimately the Qi of pure Yang – Heaven. This is the concept of 'returning to the source', which is so important to Daoist teachings and the process discussed in the rest of this book.

What I have outlined in this introductory chapter is much of the background information required in order to understand Daoist Nei Dan. I would advise that you spend some time becoming familiar with this material before moving on to any of the exercises contained in this book. A strong theoretical basis is required in order to ensure that you are not 'fumbling in the dark' with your Nei Dan training.

WHO SHOULD NOT PRACTISE NEI DAN?

There are rarely any classical pieces of guidance given as to who should not train in the internal arts. This is most likely because students were hand-picked in past times, whereas now the practices are more commonly available. I would strongly advise against those under the age of 18 training in any alchemical methods. The emotions have not yet settled to a point of stability where a young person is ready for work at this level. This means that adjustments to the mind are still taking place during the young person's most delicate formative stages. In ancient times they took children through these practices, but those children were living away from society within Daoist communities. I never believe that children should do any real internal cultivation work beyond basic-level breathing exercises. If parents are looking for something for them to study, then they should take them to a good martial arts class. An important aspect of Daoism is understanding the natural rhythms of life; in the case of children, their energy is growing and wishing to express itself. This is what should be focused on, not stilling the mind and changing the way that it develops. I studied some aspects of internal cultivation under the age of 18 and I would not advise it to others.

Also, pregnant women should not train in Nei Dan or any other strong alchemical work. The body's energy is undergoing a great shift to help with the development of another life. This means that the mother's Jing goes into a certain cycle that is required for safe and healthy fetal development. To disrupt the movement of Jing at this stage runs the risk of affecting the child.

Although Nei Dan has the effect of changing the acquired mind, it should only be approached by those who are not diagnosed as having a psychiatric illness. Qi Gong and Chinese medicine may be used by those with these conditions until such time as they feel stable enough to enter Nei Dan training. To disrupt the spirit when it is already struggling with an intense disharmonious state will only serve to make the condition worse.

Those with serious heart conditions should approach the practice of Nei Dan with care. If there is stagnation of energy or Heat around the heart, then you run the risk of making this worse. If the 'firing process' is practised correctly, then there will be no problem, but if you make a mistake, then a slight pressure can be put on the heart. For a healthy person this is no problem, but there is a slight risk for those with a weak heart. In this case, you should stabilize the condition of the heart or speak with an experienced practitioner of Nei Dan or Chinese medicine to understand

what needs to be done in order to change the condition of your heart enough for you safely begin Nei Dan training.

DEFINITIONS

A common question asked by new students is: What are the differences between Qi Gong, Nei Gong and Nei Dan? The answer to this will depend largely upon the teacher. This is because each teacher will often use terminology in different ways according to the tradition in which they were taught. Some will use the terms Qi Gong and Nei Gong interchangeably, while others will often do the same with the terms Nei Gong and Nei Dan. It is important when you begin working with any teacher to understand the terminology they are using.

In my case, I use the term Qi Gong to refer to the practice of working towards mastery of your own internal energy system. This is carried out through the practice of various moving and stationary exercises, which usually involve a combination of posture, breath and mental intention. Qi Gong is then further divided into different categories depending upon its individual aims. From these categories, medical Qi Gong is certainly the most common, with martial Qi Gong being next in popularity.

Nei Gong refers to a specific internal process that some practitioners of the internal arts choose to go through. This process of change often utilizes Qi Gong exercises, although not all Qi Gong includes the potential for much movement along the Nei Gong process. There is no such thing as a 'Nei Gong exercise' (according to my use of the terminology), as it is a series of stages along which a practitioner seeks to move.

Nei Dan is unique and differs from Qi Gong and Nei Gong as this is the stage of meditative training that works almost purely with the congenital aspects of the human body system and in particular the lights of Xing and Ming when they are refined to their most dense state. It is considered a higher and more difficult process than either Qi Gong or Nei Gong.

Chapter 2

CLASSICAL CHARTS

The Nei Dan tradition was initially preserved as an oral tradition passed on from teacher to apprentice. Over time, as the lineages grew in size and the need for correct preservation of methods grew in importance, more writings and scriptures began to appear within the Daoist tradition. Many of these are preserved within the *Dao Zang* (道藏), which is the canon of alchemical texts numbering more than 1400 pieces of scripture. Everything from medicine and meditation through to magical talismans and exorcism is discussed within the *Dao Zang*, which forms one of the greatest resources of internal instruction in the Eastern world. In addition, various pieces of scripture, charts and diagrams were often developed and passed on to students within the alchemical schools which encompassed many of the alchemical methodologies. These charts made little sense to the lay person but, to the initiated, the symbolic language coupled with the imagery gave students a useful source of guidance for their practice. Two of the most well known of these charts are the Nei Jing Tu (内经图) and the Xiu Zhen Tu (修真图). These two charts are often presented together as a pair even though they originated from different sources. These two charts together contain a wealth of information for practitioners of Nei Dan and so it would seem inappropriate to write a book on Nei Dan without including some discussion of the content of these two charts.

In this chapter I will discuss the information contained within these charts in their entirety, giving an overview of the Nei Dan process. It is my hope that those reading this book will then be able to see how the practices from the proceeding chapters can be connected back to the information contained within these two charts.

THE NEI JING TU

The Nei Jing Tu shows an abstracted view of the human body, pictured as a microcosm of the outer universe. In this way it adheres to the classical Daoist idea of the microcosm of the human body being an exact replica of the macrocosm of the outside world. It is shown in Figure 2.1. The image is of a person from the side, with the bottom of the chart being the base of the torso and the top of the chart being the head.

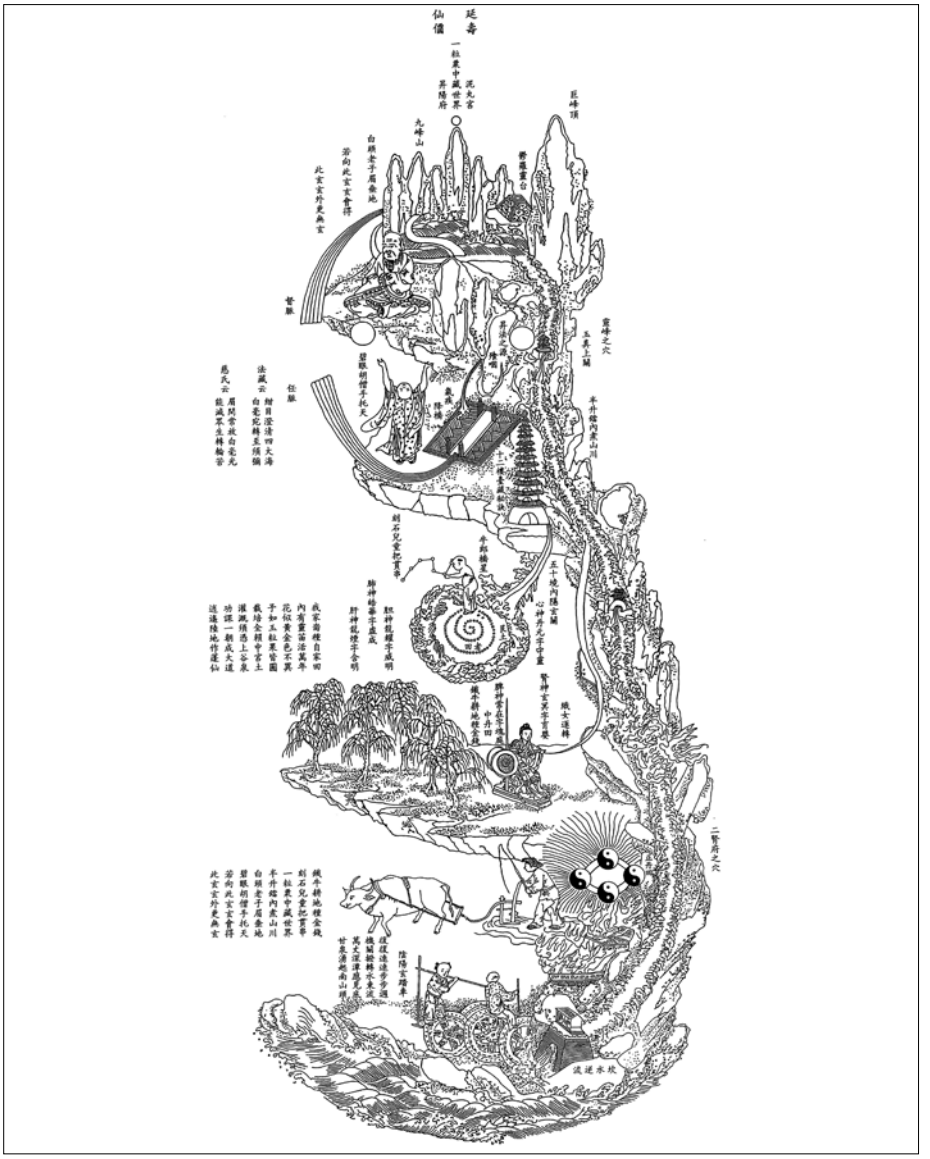


Figure 2.1: The Nei Jing Tu

It is difficult to literally translate the characters Nei Jing Tu into English but a close approximation would be 'the internal classic chart' or 'the chart of the inner landscape'. I first encountered this chart as an inscription dated 1886 on the wall of the White Cloud Temple in Beijing where I was studying for a while. Although it was carved on to the wall of the temple courtyard on this date, it is certainly a much older diagram which has been copied out lovingly by hand countless times prior to making its way to Beijing.

The Lower Portion of the Nei Jing Tu

The Nei Jing Tu shows many of the basic principles of both Nei Dan and Nei Gong training. I have divided the chart into sections and will discuss each of the sections individually. Figure 2.2 shows the lower portion of the Nei Jing Tu.



Figure 2.2: The Lower Portion of Nei Jing Tu

The lower portion of the Nei Jing Tu begins with a lake of water around the base of the torso, representing the Jing fluid which resides at first between the Kidneys but then moves down into the region of Hui Yin (會陰) sitting at the perineum. This is an important area of the body because through controlled use of the muscles at the perineum we can initiate the early

stages of the Nei Dan process. The natural flow for this essence is then to 'leak' from its source through movement into bodily fluids, but within Nei Dan practice we have to learn to reverse this process. The text at the bottom of the chart reads 'Kan water flowing in reverse' and is a direct reference to this concept. Kan (坎) is the name of the trigrammatic symbol from the *Yi Jing*, which is used to represent the essence when it sits in this area of the body.

The bottom figures in the chart are two boys working a series of treadmills attached to a building through which the water is flowing. These two represent Yin and Yang, and, according to the text, they are riding the 'mysterious Yin and Yang wheel'. This shows the early stage of using the breath and the intention while utilizing a particular method to initiate the rotation of the body's Qi within the lower part of the abdomen. This rotation stirs the energy within the energetic cavity known as the 'lower burner', which is the section of the body shown in the lower portion of the Nei Jing Tu. As this 'wheel' begins to turn, it raises the Water of Jing up further in the body, causing it to have a direct relationship with the lower Dan Tien (丹田), the lowest key energy centre of the human body.

The Water flows up to the lower Dan Tien, which is represented by four Yin Yang symbols rotating in a circular shape and emitting rays of heat. This is entitled the 'correct Dan Tien' and shows that the natural way for the Dan Tien to function within Daoist alchemical training is for it to rotate smoothly within the lower aspect of the abdomen. Part of the way in which we can utilize this Dan Tien action in Nei Dan practice is through the use of the 'lower furnace', which we shall discuss later. This is the energetic expansion of the Qi around the perineum, represented by burning flames in a furnace directly below the rotating Yin Yang symbols of the Dan Tien. It is only my assumption, as it is not mentioned in the text on the chart, but I came to the conclusion that these four points on the Dan Tien were shown due to a tendency to stick at four locations within the centre of the body when it begins to start its rotation. Anybody who has practised Nei Gong for some time will have found these four 'sticking' points as they can take a little work to break free from. The initial reaction to the rotation of the lower Dan Tien is a feeling of glowing warmth within your belly, shown by the rays radiating from the Dan Tien in the chart.

The 'iron ox', as it is called in the chart, is working the fields to 'sow golden coins' which the farmer 'strings together'. This shows the amount of diligent work and practice that is required here in the early foundational stages of the training in order to progress. Daoism places great importance

upon building a solid base and here, at the stage of transmuting Jing to Qi, the honest practitioner should carry out a lot of work, as if 'ploughing fields' in order to prepare the ground for the 'sowing of golden coins', a metaphorical reference to attaining high levels of spiritual transcendence.

To the right of Figure 2.2 we can see the Water of Jing beginning to rise as Qi through the spine of the body which is the spinal branch of the thrusting meridian.

The Middle Portion of the Nei Jing Tu

The middle section of the Nei Jing Tu shows the region of the body above the diaphragm. It primarily focuses upon the internal organs sitting within the chest cavity. This is the section shown in Figure 2.3. The two main characters in this section of the chart are 'cowherd boy' and 'weaving girl'.



Figure 2.3: The Middle Portion of the Nei Jing Tu

At the bottom of this section sits the weaving girl who represents the spirit of the Kidneys. The Kidneys are Yin and represent the innate feminine power of the body in comparison with the Heart, which is represented by cowherd boy above, shown playing with the Big Dipper (Plough) constellation. In Chinese legend, the two were lovers who, through a cruel twist of fate, were only allowed to meet once a year by travelling

across the backs of a line of magpies which formed a bridge into the stars. Weaving girl is sitting on the Earth and represents the potential for Earthly intuitive wisdom which could be released if only she could meet up with and exchange energies with cowherd boy who contains the potential for spiritual elevation. Within the body this is known as the 'mixing of Water and Fire', which is the manifestation of the spiritual essences of the Kidneys and Heart mixing together. This is initiated by stirring the stillness of the Kidneys to movement and causing the agitated movement of the Heart to grow still. This is a difficult stage of progression which causes difficulty for many practitioners of Nei Dan.

Cowherd boy is sitting upon the middle Dan Tien which is located in the same region as the Heart. The middle Dan Tien is represented by a rotating swirl, which shows the Taiji movement taking place within its core. The text states that the middle Dan Tien is the 'field upon which the Gen (艮) mountain sits'. The Gen mountain is a reference to the symbol from the *Yi Jing* scripture which denotes stillness. The emotional energy of the Heart must be stilled in order for the 'mixing of Water and Fire to take place'. Cowherd boy is depicted holding on to the Big Dipper constellation, an important symbol in Daoist cosmology. This is the constellation that is said to rotate within the night sky and dictate the balance of Heavenly Yin and Yang. Through silencing the Heart it shows that connection to the balance of Yin and Yang within the human Heaven, the consciousness, can be achieved. This leads to transcendence and the high state metaphorically inscribed in the chart as being shown by the cowherd boy 'stringing together golden coins'.

Interestingly, the Tongue is said to be related to the Heart within Daoist medical teachings, and the middle Dan Tien, which the cowherd boy is standing upon, is drawn to look like the tongue, though this is not alluded to within the text. The 'tongue' is surrounded by fluid, representing the 'jade fluid' which fills the mouth when the 'magpie bridge' is formed. This is the name for the connection of the tongue to the roof of the mouth, which is a must in alchemical practice.

The remaining text around the middle portion of the chart discusses the different organs of the body, including the Liver, the Lungs and the Spleen. The trees to the left of the image represent the Lungs, though the other organs are not shown. The large block of text to the left of the image discusses the importance of balancing the energies of the Heart centre, as here lies the potential for emergence of the immortal elixir. This elixir must then be 'irrigated' from the 'spring' of the upper portion of the Nei Jing Tu.

The Upper Portion of the Nei Jing Tu

The upper portion of the Nei Jing Tu depicts the head of the practitioner. It is shown in Figure 2.4. The characters within this section of the Nei Jing Tu are the 'blue-eyed foreign monk' and 'Laozi'.

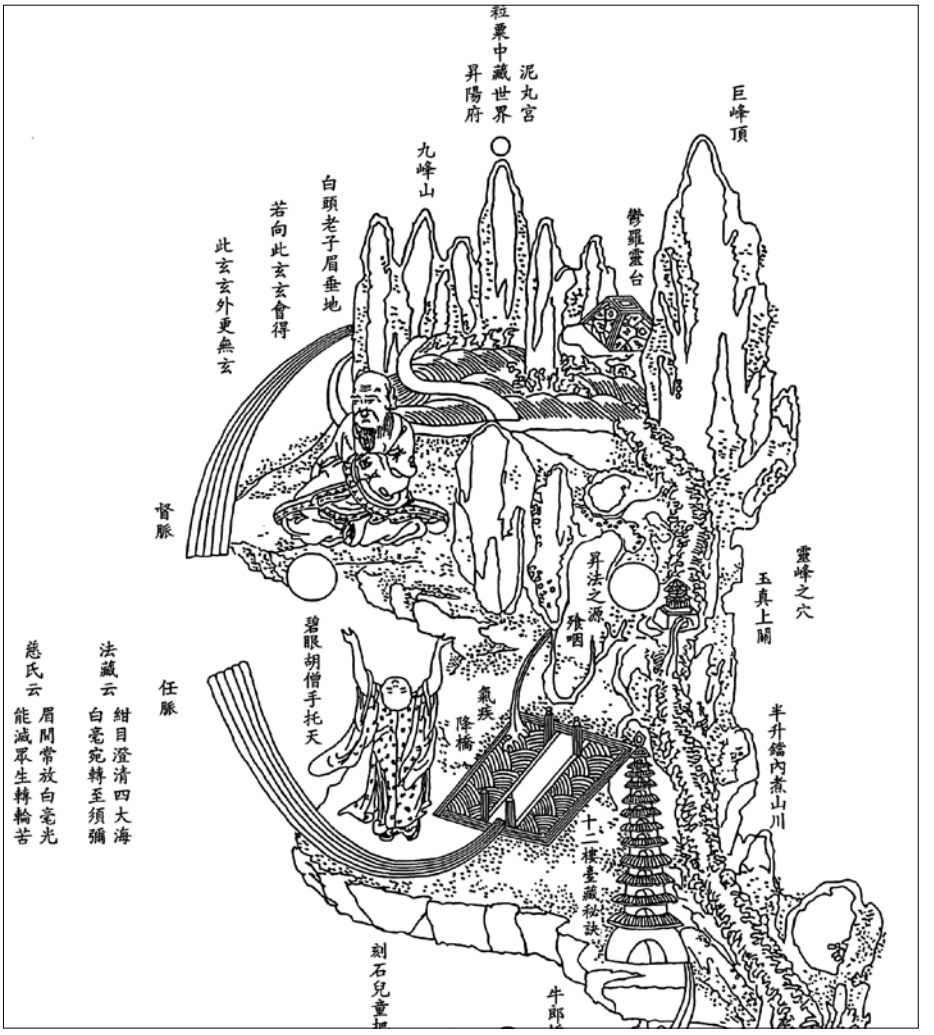


Figure 2.4: The Upper Portion of the Nei Jing Tu

The 12-tiered pagoda at the bottom of this image represents the rings of the trachea, although anatomically people generally tend to have between 15 and 20 of these rings. This is demonstrating the importance of the uprightness of the neck during Nei Dan practice. Allowing the neck to collapse is a common error, especially as people begin to relax.

Above the pagoda is a square pool of water with a white bridge extending across it. This bridge is the placing of the tongue on to the roof of the mouth, which connects the Du (督脈) and Ren (任脈) meridians together. These two meridians are extending out from the bridge and from the mountain peaks at the top of the head as if they are going to form a ring. This connection is the 'small water wheel of Qi', also known as the 'microcosmic orbit'. This is an important circulation of Qi, which must be taking place within the body before more advanced Nei Dan practices are engaged with. This circulation ensures that any of the energetic substances within the body that we work with are able to discharge back down into the rest of the energetic matrix if they need to. If this is not able to happen, then you may get one of two major imbalances taking place. The first is an excess of Qi rising upwards, which can lead to many illnesses developing, and the second is a leakage of Qi, which will gradually drain you. These are both difficult conditions to treat afterwards and rely on a very skilled Qi Gong therapist or Chinese medicine practitioner who understands what is happening to you. I have encountered a number of people who have developed problems from previous internal practices, and in many cases they thought they had activated this circuit when in fact they had not. If you look closely at Figure 2.4, you can even see a representation of Qi leakage as there is water springing from the rocks into the pool beside the bridge. The characters next to it simply read 'Qi disease'.

The two orbs within the middle of this image represent the eyes of the person as well as the sun and the moon. The sun and the moon were said to revolve around the pivot of the Kun Lun (崑崙山) mountains within Daoist mythology. This was a mythical mountain which was said to be the home of the Heavenly realm, much like Mount Olympus in Greek mythology. The characters around this image show that the head is represented as being the nine peaks of the Kun Lun mountains, and it is here that the Water rising within the spine reaches its conclusion. This shows the conversion of Jing to Qi to Shen as it moves up into the head. The nine peaks of the mountain represent the nine sections of the upper Dan Tien, which are actually discussed in more detail in the Xiu Zhen Tu than in the Nei Jing Tu. The sun and moon also represent the alchemical agents of Fire and Water in Nei Dan scripture. Heaven and Earth are the pure manifestations of Yang and Yin, while the sun and moon, Fire and Water, are the less constant states of Yang and Yin when subject to movement and cyclical change. Within the microcosm of the human body, Heaven and Earth represent the unmoving

power of true consciousness, while the revolution of the sun and moon show the nature of the transient mind.

Right on top of the middle peak is a small orb with the text 'a grain of millet which contains the whole cosmos'. This is the alchemical pill, the result of the fusion of various energetic substances within the body to formulate the initial ingredient of existence itself. This is a very high level of attainment in Daoist alchemy, which is discussed towards the conclusion of this book.

The two characters in this image are Laozi, who is said to have 'white eyebrows hanging down to Earth', and the blue-eyed foreign monk, who is said to be 'supporting the Heavens'. This monk is theorized to be Bodhidharma, the patriarch of Chan (禪) Buddhism. He is often referred to by the name Bi Yan Hu (碧眼胡) in Chinese texts, which is roughly translated as meaning 'blue-eyed foreigner'. The placement of these two characters shows the coming together of Daoism and Buddhism that was taking place at the time of the formation of the Nei Jing Tu. Bodhidharma is shown supporting the Heavens, which represent the mind; this shows how Buddhist influences upon alchemical teachings had changed the way in which the Daoists looked at and understood the workings of the human psyche. Buddhism places a great deal of emphasis on the workings of human consciousness and many of their theories were absorbed by the Daoists in order to assist them in their practice. Wise old Laozi has his eyebrows hanging down from the Heavens towards Earth which represents the body. Daoism has far more detailed teachings on the health and preservation of the physical body and places a greater emphasis upon it than Buddhism generally does. At the time, the patriarchs of the Daoist lineages realized that the most correct path was the bringing together of both wisdom traditions as this was the surest way to reach success in their endeavours. This is the basis for the theory of bringing together Xing and Ming within Nei Dan.

A final interesting inscription on this section of the Nei Jing Tu states that a 'brilliant white light should emanate from between the eyebrows. This will release practitioners from the endless cycle or transmigration.' The location of this white light is the Yin Tang (印堂) meridian point, often referred to as the 'third eye' in other traditions. This is a clear reference to the observation of the Shen Ming (神明) which takes place during alchemical training at certain levels. This is the brilliant white light of spiritual realization, indicating the opening of the connection to true consciousness.

Concluding the Nei Jing Tu

This has been a brief overview of the Nei Jing Tu diagram. There are many more small details on this chart but I just wished to introduce the relevant aspects of this image to the practices outlined in the rest of the book. A complete discussion of everything contained within the Nei Jing Tu could take an entire volume as it has guided countless practitioners deeper into their study for many generations. I have omitted aspects of the Nei Jing Tu that are repeated in the Xiu Zhen Tu chart discussed below. On the whole, the Nei Jing Tu is not as complete or as detailed as the Xiu Zhen Tu, and so where both charts discuss the same material, I have chosen to keep this within the discussion of the Xiu Zhen Tu.

THE XIU ZHEN TU

The Xiu Zhen Tu shows a more literal depiction of the human body sitting in a meditative pose, complete with internal viscera and their connection to spiritual animals and the lunar phases. It is shown in Figure 2.5.

The name Xiu Zhen Tu can be translated as meaning 'the chart of cultivating perfection', although a more literal translation would be 'the chart of cultivating the state of Zhen'. This is because Zhen (真) is a difficult term to translate simply within the context of Daoism. The term forms part of the name for a high-level adept of the Daoist arts – a Zhen Ren (真人) – which is somebody who has managed to reach the stage of balancing the acquired mind and operating fully from the state of the congenital consciousness. Perhaps we could equate this with the term of 'enlightenment' in other traditions, although this is not a word utilized in Daoism. A Zhen Ren is considered the highest possible level of attainment within this world without ascending to the Heavenly realm as a Shen Xian (神仙), a divine immortal. The term Zhen Ren first appeared within the *Dao De Jing* and is a high aim of all forms of Daoist practice.

From looking at the Xiu Zhen Tu, it is clearly demonstrated that the Daoists placed great importance on understanding the nature of the inner universe of the human body. The chart includes information from the medical and cosmological traditions of Daoism as well as the alchemical. Connections to the environmental cycles are emphasized and dictate many aspects of Nei Dan training.

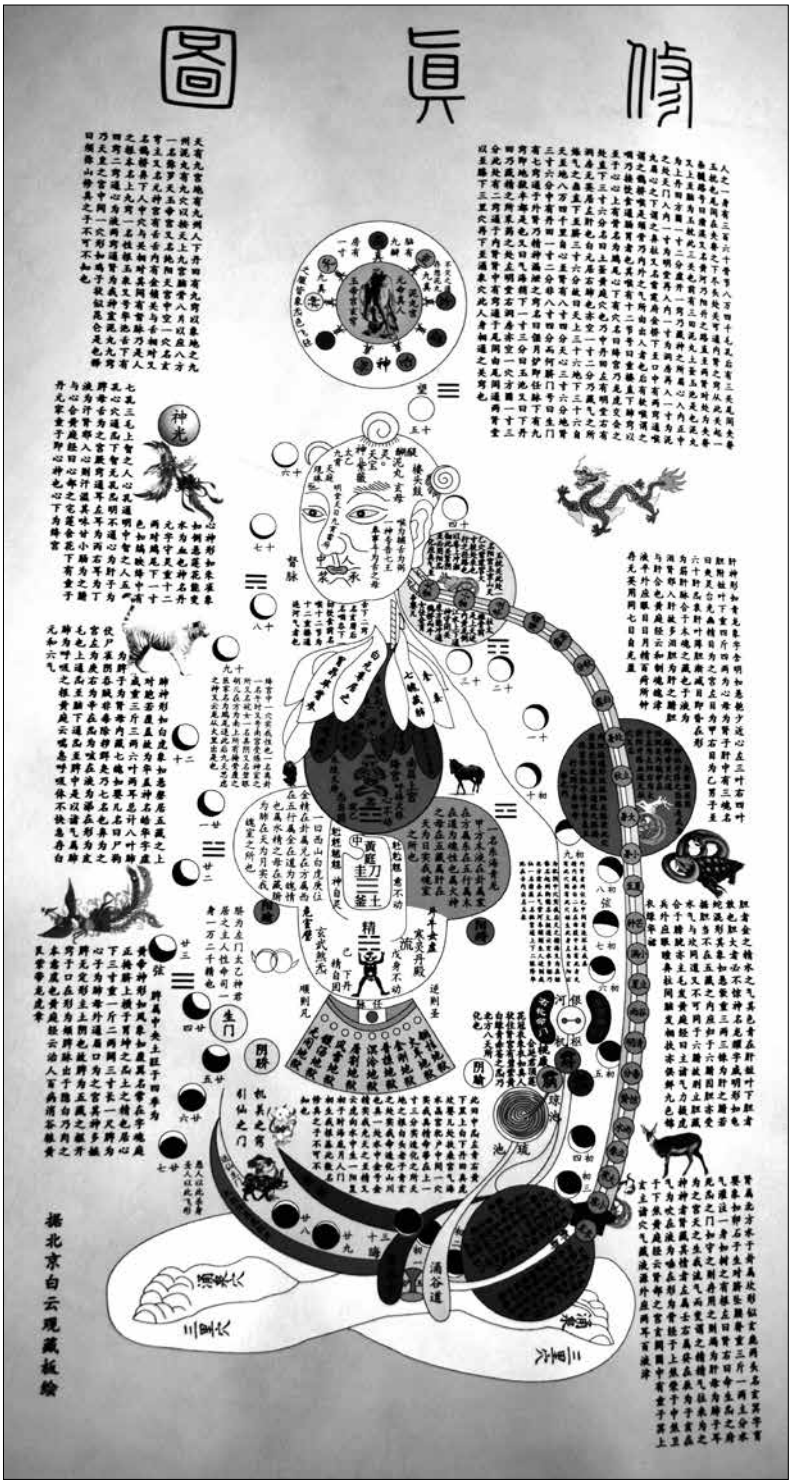


Figure 2.5: The Xiu Zhen Tu

The Lower Section of the Xiu Zhen Tu

The lower section of the Xiu Zhen Tu includes information on the lower Dan Tien, the Kidneys and other corresponding aspects of the human energy system. This is the section of the Xiu Zhen Tu depicted in Figure 2.6.

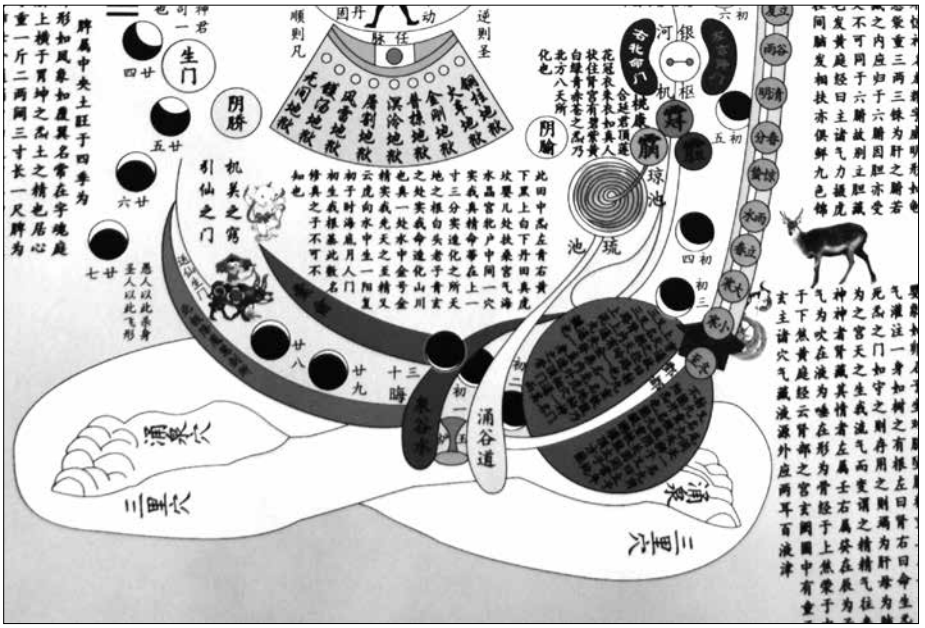


Figure 2.6: The Lower Section of the Xiu Zhen Tu

The lower section of the Xiu Zhen Tu shows the lower abdominal region which rests on top of the figure's crossed legs. The fact that he is sitting in a cross-legged posture demonstrates that the guidance contained within the chart is primarily applicable to those who are following the path of Nei Dan. Within this abdominal region are all of the workings of the lower Dan Tien, which are discussed metaphorically within the associated Chinese characters. The overall state of the lower Dan Tien is said to be 'black on the bottom and white on the top', indicating its potential to convert Jing (Yin) from the region of the perineum upwards into Qi (Yang) once the Dan Tien is awakened through practice. It is also said to govern 'green and yellow', which connects the lower Dan Tien into the energetic functioning of the Liver and Spleen. This connection to the base energetic health of the body shows that disorder within the movement and flow of energy around the region of the lower Dan Tien will probably manifest in Liver and Spleen disharmony.

The lower abdomen is stated to be the seat of 'Kan' which is the trigrammatic representation of Water within the body. This Water is the Yin component of the acquired mind and is explored in Chapter 6. It is this aspect of mind that is mixed with the Li (Fire) aspect of mind, which is Yang, to revert to a state of conscious stillness. It is also in this area of the body that the Yuan Jing resides, which is known as the formative aspect of the true self; all of this is indicated in the lower section of the Xiu Zhen Tu.

The Kidney system diagram within the Xiu Zhen Tu is particularly interesting as it contains the alchemical aspects of the Kidneys which are relevant to Nei Dan. This is the system shown in Figure 2.7.

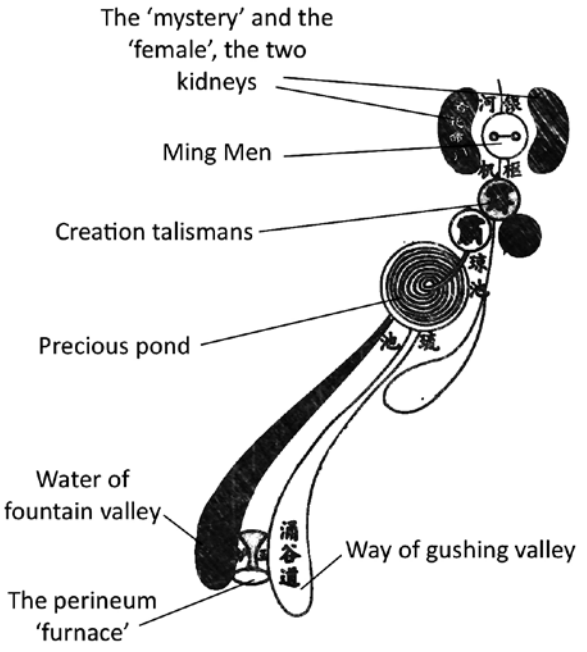


Figure 2.7: The Alchemical Kidney System

The two Kidneys are named the 'mystery' and the 'female', terms that clearly link them to the philosophical concept of the gateway of existence known as the 'mysterious female'. This shows the importance of the Kidneys as they are the organs that bring us from the realm of the congenital into the acquired realm of existence. Between them lie the Ming Men, the gateway of life that serves to move the element of Water down towards the perineum as well as raise our energy upwards along the back via the action of the 'Ming fire'. According to esoteric Daoist thought, the movement of our being from potential into manifestation can only take place as the Yuan

Jing decreases in vibration to the level of the acquired Jing. This happens because of three talismanic words that were spoken by the entity of Dao at the birth of existence. These talismanic words are reflected in many classical Daoist mantras and appear here within the Xiu Zhen Tu just below the Kidneys where the congenital becomes the acquired. These talismans show the sacred Fu (符) images for Jing, Qi and Shen. A skilled Daoist magician could use these Fu to generate a vibrational resonance that would help Nei Dan practitioners in their cultivation.

Below the three talisman characters lies the 'precious pond'. This is the storehouse of essence which we use up over the course of our life. Note that its location places it below the point of movement from the congenital to the acquired. It is the acquired Jing that resides here, and from this area of the energetic system either we allow this Jing to move down into the base of the body where it is 'leaked' out through developmental processes or it is refined upwards within the system to aid us in our search for transcendence. Moving down from the 'precious pond' of acquired Jing are the left and right testicles, which are known as the 'water of fountain valley' and the 'way of gushing valley' in alchemical scripture. This is the process of the conversion of acquired Jing into sexual fluids (in the case of male practitioners). Between the two sits the perineum which serves as the 'furnace' for us when we begin the 'firing process', discussed in detail in Chapter 5. In the Xiu Zhen Tu it is actually named the 'jade furnace', the alchemical name for the meridian point that sits here.

Depicted beside the Kidney system are the nine sections of the lower Dan Tien which are shown in Figure 2.8. These sit below the 'elixir pill', which is generally coloured red in painted versions of the chart.

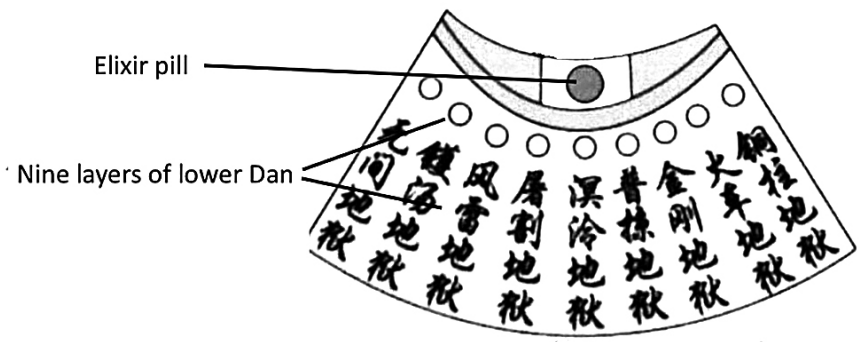


Figure 2.8: The Lower Dan Tien

The nine sections of the lower Dan Tien take the form of nine individually rotating layers which work like a large, energetic, multi-layered gyroscope when it is fully awakened. Sometimes this is depicted as nine rings or spirals which appear on the lower abdomens of Daoist Zhen Ren. Both the lower and the upper Dan Tien have nine sections and these in turn correspond to the nine layers of the Heavenly realm in religious Daoist belief. Within the Xiu Zhen Tu we see the connections with religious forms of Buddhism which had nine layers of hell that served as a punishment for those entering the judgement of the afterlife. Though not originally a Daoist concept, Daoism absorbed many religious aspects of Buddhist teachings, such as the layers of hell which became linked to the sections of the lower Dan Tien. Since religious Daoism is not an interest of mine, I will not go into detail about the layers of hell and their meanings; for reference, however, these layers are named:

- Upright Copper Hell
- Burning Chariot Hell
- Indestructible Substance Hell
- Hell of Acquired Goods
- Ice Cold Hell
- Slash and Murder Hell
- Wind and Thunder Hell
- Melted Metal Hell
- Everlasting Hell

Above the nine sections of the lower Dan Tien is the 'elixir pill', which shows the potential of the lower Dan Tien to serve as the birthing house of the combined substances of congenital reality for those who attain the highest stages of Nei Dan. It is classically coloured red in order to link the pill to the substance of cinnabar which is an alchemical term used extensively within Nei Dan.

The Middle Section of the Xiu Zhen Tu

The middle section of the Xiu Zhen Tu depicts the middle Dan Tien, the theory of the 'mixing of Kan and Li' and the various internal organs. This is the section of the Xiu Zhen Tu shown in Figure 2.9.

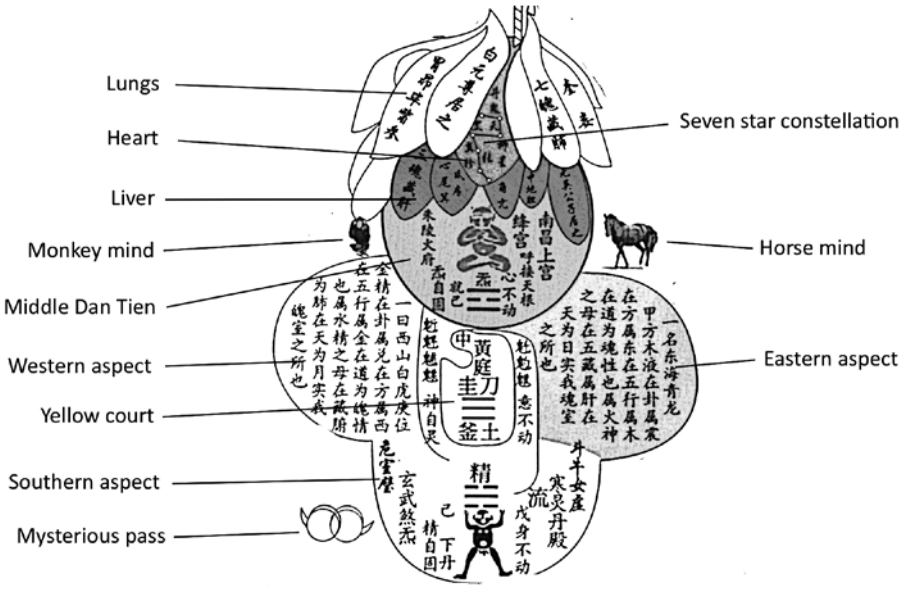


Figure 2.9: The Middle Section of the Xiu Zhen Tu

Each of the internal organs within the Xiu Zhen Tu is discussed with regard to its alchemical and spiritual properties. It is really within the Xiu Xhen Tu that we are shown the important concept of the physical body serving to anchor the various energetic and spiritual aspects of our being into the realm of existence. Each organ houses a specific aspect of the human spirit and this in turn causes us to resonate with various parts of the macrocosm.

The first organ to be discussed in this way is the Lungs which are said to house the seven Po spirits discussed in Chapter 1. These seven Po spirits are: Corpse Dog, Kidnapping Corpse, Dark Bird, Greedy Robber, Flying Poison, Great Poison and Rotten Lung. Various aspects of Chinese medicine are discussed, including the Lungs' connection to the nose and the skin, its role as the 'canopy' of the viscera and its link to respiration and circulation of the body fluids. It is said that, during Nei Dan practice, abnormal disturbance in the spirit of the Lungs will lead to spontaneous coughing. Interestingly, the left and right nostrils are named Geng (庚) and Xin (辛) respectively. Geng and Xin are two of the Tian Gan (天干) or 'Heavenly stems'. These

are a model of the Yin and Yang divisions of the five elemental energies within the cosmos. Geng and Xin indicate that the left nostril is Yang Metal and the right nostril is Yin Metal. During Nei Dan practice you will notice after some time that you tend to breathe more through one nostril than the other. This preference for nostril will change over the course of the year and the seasons, and will reflect your tendency towards Yin and Yang within the body. This will change with time and development until the breathing equalizes and both nostrils are used equally.

The second organ to be discussed is the Heart. Along with Chinese medical information are descriptions of the experience of rising congenital Shen within the centre of the Heart. This is an aspect of alchemy discussed in Chapter 8 of this book. When the congenital Shen arises here, a brilliant light will be perceived within the darkness. This is an indicator that the seven 'orifices' of the Heart have been opened. These are the seven spaces within the middle Dan Tien which pulse around the Heart region of the body; each of these corresponds with one of the stars of the 'seven star constellation', which we generally know as the Big Dipper or the Plough in the West. This constellation is particularly important in Daoism because it scoops up and redistributes the Qi of the Heavens over the course of each year. This ensures that the various energetic cycles of the cosmos maintain their harmonious state. The Heart is closely connected to this constellation, which is very important for women as their natural affinity with the spirit of the Heart centre makes them greatly influenced by the rotation of the 'seven star constellation' within the sky. It is for this reason that the constellation is depicted in the middle of the organ of the Heart on the Xiu Zhen Tu. It also states here that practitioners of mediocre ability will only attain the opening of a maximum of five of the Heart's spaces, which will enable them to work with their spirits but not Heaven itself. Practitioners of low skill will attain no space within the Heart, meaning that stillness is not theirs to experience and the spirit of the Heart will evade them. Like the Nei Jing Tu, the cowherd boy is mentioned within the script, a fact that closely links the two charts together.

The Liver and Spleen are discussed primarily with regard to their medical aspects as well as discussing the location of the three Hun and the connection of these organs to the health of the body and energetic system. I have omitted many of the medical facts in the Xiu Zhen Tu as this information can be found in any classical Chinese medicine text book.

The two animals, the horse and monkey, are shown on this chart either side of the middle Dan Tien. Note that in this version of the Xiu Zhen Tu

many of the original carvings of the animals surrounding the image have been replaced with modern versions. The version of the Xiu Zhen Tu used in this book is taken from a modern copy of the original image which I have on a scroll on my wall. This is quite helpful as the original drawings were not drawn very well and are actually quite difficult to understand. The horse and the monkey represent two states of mind that are required for any kind of alchemical work. The monkey mind is playful and busy; it is the state of a beginner where countless thoughts rush through the mind when you are trying to practise Nei Dan. The horse mind is still and quiet; this is the state of the experienced practitioner who has learned to govern their thought processes. These two animals make it clear that no deep alchemical work can take place unless the endless chatter of the acquired mind has begun to grow still. A common way of doing this is to follow the movements of the breath, a practice that almost all practitioners of meditation will have come across in the early days of their training.

Also shown are the four compass directions of North, South, East and West. The northern aspect is represented by the middle Dan Tien. North and South represent the elements of Fire and Water, shown by the inclusion of the *Yi Jing* trigrams associated with these elements. The trigram of Fire – Li – appears within the region of the middle Dan Tien, and the trigram of Water – Kan – appears within the lower aspect of the abdomen, which corresponds with the lower Dan Tien and the Kidney system. These two elements are 'mixed' through the process of working with Kan and Li as discussed in Chapter 6. These two then combine within the centre of the body within a region known as the 'yellow court', shown on the chart. When this has been achieved, the five elements move into balance and the energies of East and West move into place. This process is discussed in Chapters 6 and 7 of this book. Metaphorically, this movement of the body's energetic state towards the four directions is known as the 'copulation of dragon and tiger'; this is an advanced stage of Nei Dan practice.

When the five elements move into place and the four directions line up, the mysterious pass can open; this is depicted as the two interlocking rings to the bottom left of Figure 2.9. These two interlocking rings show the coming together of original Yin and original Yang. Together these produce the shape commonly known as the vesica piscis, which represents the opening of the gateway to the formation of reality. This is the portal to connection with Dao that high-level Nei Dan adepts will reach through diligent practice.

The Upper Section of the Xiu Zhen Tu

The upper section of the Xiu Zhen Tu shows the head of the Nei Dan practitioner as well as the upper Dan Tien and its connection to alchemical practice. This section of the chart is shown in Figure 2.10.

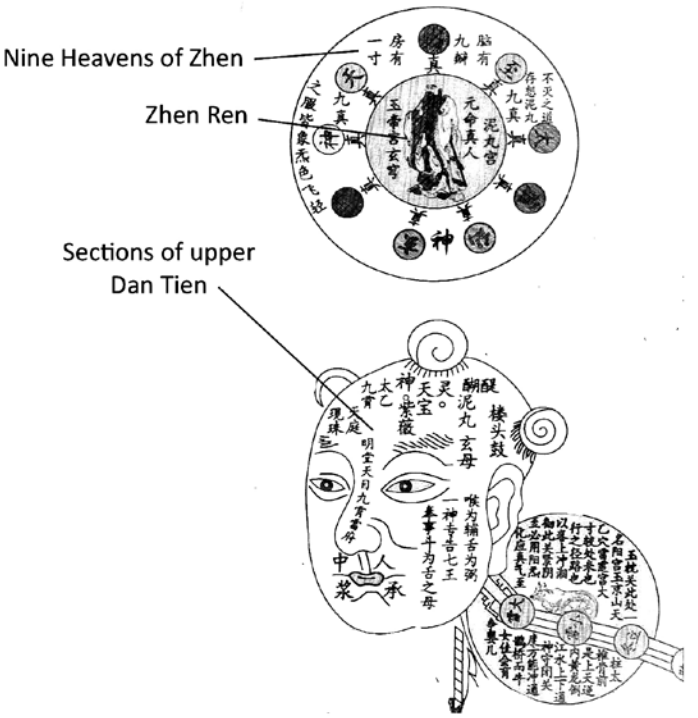


Figure 2.10: The Upper Section of the Xiu Zhen Tu

The 'nine Heavens of Zhen' are the various layers of the immortal realm that a person may choose to reside within once they have escaped the physical realm through attainment of spiritual immortality; this is the highest goal of alchemical Daoism. These nine Heavens are increasingly high states of spiritual being which correspond to different stages of elevation of Yuan Shen. These nine Heavens are named:

- High Zhen attainment
- Perfect Zhen attainment
- Great Zhen attainment
- Empty Zhen attainment

- Eternal Perfect Zhen attainment
- Mysterious Zhen attainment
- Better Zhen attainment
- Divine Zhen attainment
- Heaven Zhen attainment

These Heavens are arranged in eight compass directions, with the highest Heaven at the centre. Each corresponds to one of the eight main symbols of the *Yi Jing* and can be mapped out in the constellations of the night sky. In addition, the central Heaven is often associated with our sun, while each of the remaining eight Heavens is linked to one of the eight planets in our solar system. The list of Heavens is included in this book for the sake of completeness as their study is somewhat academic and nobody will encounter these levels of existence until they have attained spiritual immortality, a stage of attainment that currently eludes me.

The various sections of the upper Dan Tien are discussed within the text here. It is stated that the nine sections of the lower Dan Tien correspond to the nine continents of the Earth because the ancient Chinese mapped the world out differently from how it is seen in modern times. The nine sections of the upper Dan Tien correspond to the nine Heavens, and the eight cranial plates of the skull correspond to the eight directions. The nine sections of the upper Dan Tien are as follows:

- Mud pill palace
- Dark mother
- Shining spirit
- Heaven's treasure
- Purple palace
- Heaven's court
- Shining pearl
- Divine brightness
- Bright hall

Each of these nine sections is connected to a different aspect of contacting the Yuan Shen. In brief, the 'mud pill palace' is considered the centre of the upper Dan Tien and this part corresponds to the physical root of the pineal gland. The 'dark mother' is the stillness at the centre of the pineal gland, which a practitioner can drop into through deep Nei Dan training. 'Heaven's treasure' is the location of the Yuan Shen's core, which is born from the centre of the 'dark mother'. The 'purple palace' is the abode of the 'dark mother', the aspect of the upper Dan Tien that connects us into the 'seven star constellation'. 'Heaven's court' is the shell within which all of this happens. The 'shining pearl' is the outer wall of 'Heaven's court' and contacting it results in the brilliant light of Yuan Shen forming into a solid white ball in your mind's eye. 'Divine brightness' is the outer layer of the upper Dan Tien; when you attain connection with this layer, your vision is filled with a bright, radiant, white light which is almost blinding. The 'bright hall' is the entranceway to the upper Dan Tien which appears like a white tunnel of rotating light that you move through in your mind's eye during Nei Dan training. I have conceptualized this in Figure 2.11, although, of course, the upper Dan Tien is beyond physical structure. Though rooted in the pineal gland, it exists in the congenital realm and essentially is formed from ever-deepening connection to the innermost aspects of consciousness.

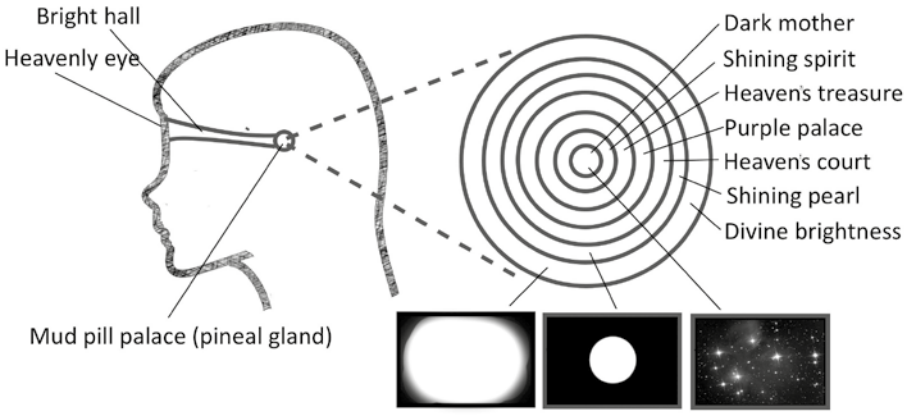


Figure 2.11: The Concept of the Nine Layers of Upper Dan Tien

Also included on the chart is the 'Heavenly eye', commonly known as the 'third eye' in the West. At the bottom of the image I have included three boxes with depictions of the visual experience of touching upon these different layers of the upper Dan Tien. The first box shows a bright white

light which floods the darkness when you contact the 'divine brightness'. The second box is the consolidation of this light as you touch the 'shining pearl' layer, and the third box shows the movement into the 'dark mother', which appears as if you are floating out into space, surrounded by stars.

The rest of the information concerning the head within the Xiu Zhen Tu repeats the information from the Nei Jing Tu and I omit it from this discussion in order to avoid that repetition.

The Three Animal Carts

An important aspect of the Xiu Zhen Tu is the three animal carts that sit along the Du meridian of the depicted practitioner. These are shown in Figure 2.12. Also depicted are the 24 vertebrae that run beneath the Du meridian as well as the 24 seasonal periods that correspond to each individual bone.

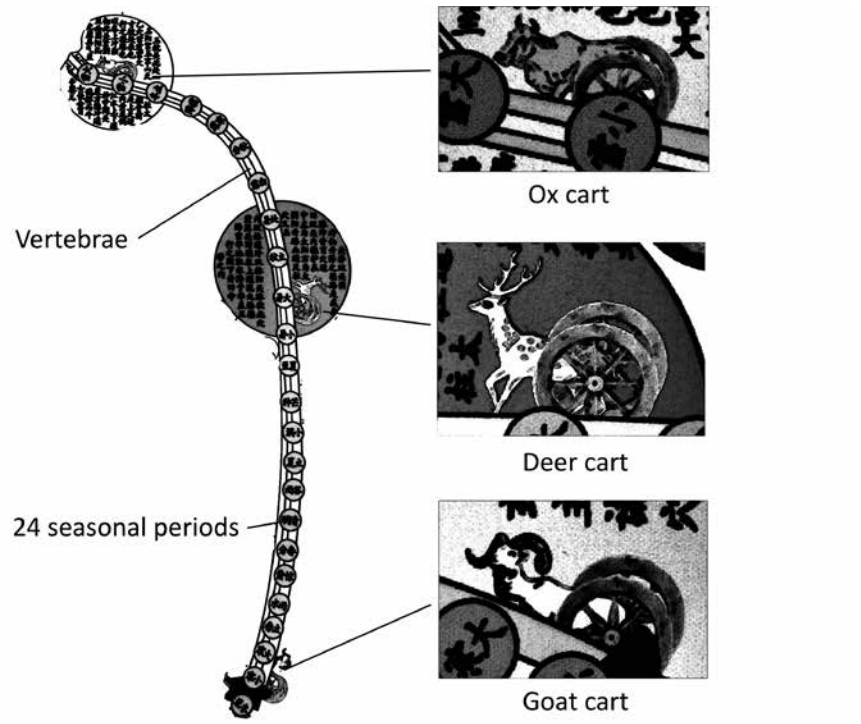


Figure 2.12: The Three Animal Carts of the Xiu Zhen Tu

The three animal carts represent three breathing methods that are used to lead the congenital 'fluid' produced during the 'firing process'. Each method

serves to draw the 'fluid' up through the back of the body to clear one of the three sections of the spine. The goat represents a quick breath, the deer a long, gentle breath and the ox a deep, powerful breath which clears the spine and draws the substance into the head. These methods are discussed in Chapter 5. Notes next to the three animal carts indicate that the majority of practitioners never make it past the first cart aspect of the spine and so never move beyond the absolute earliest stages of Nei Dan training.

Along the length of the spine are shown the 24 seasonal periods of the ancient Chinese calendar. These are listed in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: The 24 Seasonal Periods and Associated Vertebrae

Period	Chinese	Translation	Vertebra	Date
Da Xue	大雪	Big Snow	Cervical 1	7 December
Xiao Xue	小雪	Small Snow	Cervical 2	22 November
Li Dong	立冬	Winter Begins	Cervical 3	7 November
Shuang Jiang	霜降	Frost Descends	Cervical 4	23 October
Han Lu	寒露	Cold Dew	Cervical 5	8 October
Qiu Fen	秋分	Autumn Equinox	Cervical 6	23 September
Bai Lu	白露	White Dew	Cervical 7	8 September
Chu Shu	處暑	Heat's Limit	Thoracic 1	23 August
Li Qiu	立秋	Autumn Starts	Thoracic 2	8 August
Da Shu	大暑	Big Heat	Thoracic 3	23 July
Xiao Shu	小暑	Small Heat	Thoracic 4	7 July
Xia Zhi	夏至	Summer Solstice	Thoracic 5	21 June
Mang Zhong	芒種	Grain Grows	Thoracic 6	6 June
Xiao Man	小滿	Grain Filling	Thoracic 7	21 May
Li Xia	立夏	Summer Begins	Thoracic 8	6 May
Gu Yu	穀雨	Harvest Rain	Thoracic 9	20 April
Qing Ming	清明	Bright Clarity	Thoracic 10	5 April
Chun Fen	春分	Vernal Equinox	Thoracic 11	21 March
Jing Zhe	驚蟄	Waking Insects	Thoracic 12	6 March
Yu Shui	雨水	Rain Water	Lumbar 1	19 February
Li Chun	立春	Spring Begins	Lumbar 2	4 February
Da Han	大寒	Big Cold	Lumbar 3	20 January
Xiao Han	小寒	Small Cold	Lumbar 4	6 January
Dong Zhi	冬至	Winter Solstice	Lumbar 5	22 December

As you can see from the table, each of the 24 vertebrae within the human spine has an associated two-week period of time that is associated with one of the seasonal periods of the Chinese calendar. This shows us that the human body has a close connection with the environment and goes through various pulses and cycles in time with the energy that surrounds us. Over the course of a year, a subtle pulse of energy is sent upwards along the length of our spine, along with various other movements that are not directly linked to our yearly cycle. This pulse begins to move upwards from the base of our lumbar spine on the winter solstice and rises up to the base of the second lumbar vertebra where the Ming fire sits between our Kidneys. This pulse of energy initiates our energetic lift in accordance with the rising environmental Qi of spring time. If the Kidneys have not been adequately guarded over the winter time, then this driving force may not be strong enough and so we may set ourselves up for a bad year with low energy levels and poor health.

For Nei Dan practice, there is a major point to understanding this seasonal connection to the spine's energy. Although we do not need to circulate the movement of Qi over the course of a year, we can use the emphasis of the seasonal energy on individual parts of our back to clear resistant blockages and areas of stuck Qi. During the process of learning to raise energy along the back through the 'small water wheel of Qi', you will no doubt encounter particular spots along your back that feel as if they are stagnant. The energy moving along your back may not pass this point very easily. If we wish to use environmental energy to help us in our practice, then we can identify which vertebra corresponds to the blockage and then use the seasonal cycles to our advantage. During the two-week period that relates to that particular vertebra, you should focus on relaxing and releasing the energy in that region, using either 'Sung breathing' or the expansion technique from Chapter 5.

The Lunar Cycles

Surrounding the entire chart is a 30-day lunar cycle, as shown in Figure 2.13. This shows the correlation between the 'small water wheel of Qi' and the moon's cycle.

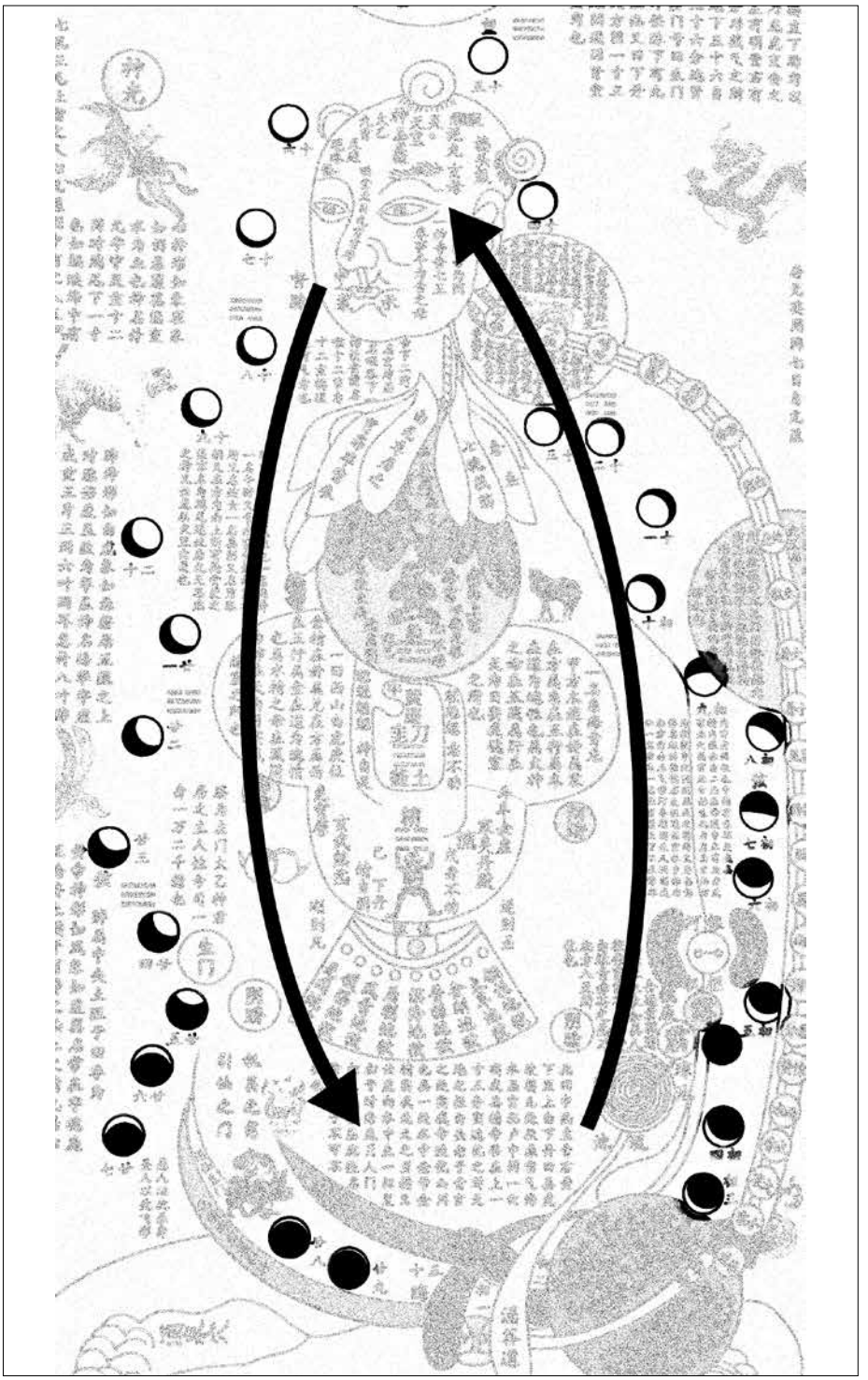


Figure 2.13: The Lunar Cycle

The chart shows the movement from the new moon at the perineum up to the full moon above the head. This stage of the cycle is the 15-day waxing phase as the moon moves from Yin to Yang. This phase is drawn with a clear correlation with the back of the body or the Du meridian. The second stage is the change from the full moon back into the new moon, which is the movement from Yang to Yin. This is the waning of the moon and is shown to relate to the front of the body or the Ren meridian.

Daoist writers who have commented on the Xiu Zhen Tu have been careful to make sure practitioners do not worry about trying to rotate the 'small water wheel of Qi' in time with the moon cycles as this is not necessary. The movement of energetic substances along this orbit is carried out independently of the lunar cycle. At the same time, though, various other circulations of energy are taking place within the body in accordance with the environmental cycles taking place around us. In the same way that the seasonal periods cause a pulse to slowly move up the length of our spine, the moon's phases direct a strong magnetic effect upon the rotation of Qi within our Du and Ren meridians. They also have a strong pulling and pushing effect upon the energy flowing within the central channel of our Chong meridian, although this is not specifically shown in the Xiu Zhen Tu. What the moon's phases mean for practitioners of Nei Dan is that it is much easier to work on the raising of the congenital fluids along the Du meridian during the waxing phase of the moon, but it is much more difficult during the waning of the moon because you are basically working against the natural flow of the channel's cycle. This is the limit of the moon's influence upon Nei Dan for male practitioners, but in Chapter 6 we will discuss the differences in the alchemical process for women and how the moon plays a much larger role in female Nei Dan methods.

Concluding the Xiu Zhen Tu

As with the discussion of the Nei Jing Tu, I have focused only on the most important elements in the diagram. I have selected the alchemical rather than the medical aspects of the text as this is what is most directly related to the methods in this book. If I were to translate and discuss the entire Xiu Zhen Tu in full, it would be a book in its own right. I chose to include both of these charts, however, to give some historical and classical background to the teachings of Nei Dan that I follow. I would suggest that all serious practitioners of Daoist alchemical methods get hold of a copy of these charts and place them near to where they regularly practise. They contain a

wealth of information which is invaluable to those on the alchemical path. Before we move on to more direct Nei Dan training methods, this chapter concludes with a translation of the poem at the top of the Xiu Zhen Tu, which aptly summarizes the entire Nei Dan process.

Dao and De are born from Heaven and Earth,
Yin and Yang are both the origin and the result of the developmental process of things.
Heavenly Hun is the father of the White Tiger,
Earthly Po is the mother of the Green Dragon.
Rotate the elixir into the mud pill palace,
Transform the Jing upwards into the highest place.
If a practitioner can understand this,
The ten thousand writings here are as simple as a child's book.

Chapter 3

XING

Xing and Ming are two important concepts in Daoist Nei Dan practice. It is the mutual improvement of and bringing together of Xing and Ming that ultimately enables a practitioner to move to increasingly high levels in their practice. If any alchemical method focuses more on one than the other, then it is an imbalanced system. Xing is an expression largely of the mind, although it is rooted in the health of the physical body, while Ming is a manifestation of the physical which is intertwined with the mental self.

NATURE AND HEART-MIND

Your Xing is your nature while your Xin (心) is often translated as meaning 'Heart-mind'. In Daoist teachings, your emotions, thoughts and desires are all born from the Heart which is seen as the centre for all aspects of the mind. In brief, your nature or Xing is converted through alchemical practices resulting from the cultivation of your Heart-mind or Xin. This takes place in two ways, through external methods and through internal cultivation. The teaching system of Daoism is the external method while the practice is the internal method.

THE EXTERNAL METHOD OF CULTIVATING XING

Human nature has the potential for all manifestations. Different behaviours that we would judge as positive or negative, kindness or cruelness, are equally able to be born from inside of a person. This has a little to do with innate nature that we are born with and largely to do with the experiences a person has had, particularly during their formative years. The way in which we learn to perceive and react to the world gives us a set of responses and views that gradually build our Xing over the course of our life. In order for some of these behaviours not to have a negative impact upon those around us

or society as a whole, we have laws that we must adhere to. As well as these, different spiritual systems and religions each have their own set of precepts which followers should adhere to. Whether these are the commandments of Christianity, the precepts of Buddhism or the compassionate guidance of Laozi, each follower of the tradition should make these guidelines a part of who they are. In this way, the guidelines become a 'safety net' for the Xing in case it falls down and the risk of negative behaviour arises.

Many of these externally delivered guidelines and boundaries for the Xing were transmitted down to us by realized individuals who understood that these were the ideal guidelines to follow in order to prepare the Xing for development according to their particular methodologies. Rather than just being a set of rules, these were an external way of ensuring that the Xing began to convert into a higher state which would open up to the higher-level internal transformations contained within their wisdom tradition.

Each spiritual tradition will have its own precepts or guidelines and these should be explored in detail. They should not just be given a cursory glance but rather should be studied as this is the basis for the external transformation of Xing. In the case of Daoism, let us look to the simple guidelines discussed within the *Dao De Jing*.

- An importance is placed upon humility. The Zhen Ren of the *Dao De Jing* places little importance upon recognition of his own self or his achievements. He does not strive to rise above others nor does he wish to stand out from the crowd.
- Compassion for all beings is emphasized, no matter what their status or their social standing. Even the lowest in society's eyes should be treated with high regard as they are all equal manifestations of the great Dao.
- Humour is a large part of the Daoist tradition, although arguably this was made clearer within the writings of Zhuangzi (莊子).
- An approach to life emphasizing simplicity is preferred, along with the concept of adhering to the flow of Ming and the movements of the spirit of Heaven.
- The concept of Wu Wei (無爲) is a key tenet of Daoism. This term has often been translated as meaning 'non-doing' and is thus misunderstood as being inactive. A better translation would be 'non-governing'. This refers to the ability to understand the

interconnected nature of everything and thus to understand when to leave things be. This is epitomized in the Daoist saying 'leave no footprints'.

- The release of virtuous aspects of your nature through cultivation of Xin through internal methods is preferred over all of these external guidelines, however. This is known as the release of the De (德).

In order to understand external methods of cultivating the Xing, we should first understand that everything is simply energy. Every thought, action and nuance of existence is only part of the vibrating mass of existence that makes up reality. This means that every aspect of our nature serves to change the state of our own innate nature and so the external guidelines given to us help to change our own internal energetic system. External precepts have a powerful energetic effect upon us and are far more than just rules that we must follow. Let us explore each of the Daoist 'precepts' in more detail.

Humility

Humility is an extremely Yin state of being. To be able to place yourself behind others is a difficult thing but important in Daoism. Energetically, this serves to create a powerful vacuum within your Xing, which draws spiritual learning towards you. When humbling yourself before a trusted teacher (or a deity in religious Daoism), you are manifesting the potential to draw teachings into the centre of your being. This is why so many practitioners in the past have had deep spiritual experiences when prostrating themselves before statues of Daoist immortals. In Daoist teachings, it should be one of your aims to be humble beneath the entire universe and understand humility before all beings. In this way the power of Dao, which flows through the cosmos, can enter you and make every aspect of life your teacher.

Compassion

Compassion towards all beings is very important in Daoism. Compassion is considered one of the jewels of the tradition and should be cultivated within the Heart of all practitioners of the Dao. Compassion is an expansive energy which moves out in waves and connects all living beings. Connection towards all life breaks down boundaries and assists in understanding the profound concept of ultimate union. Connection with the cosmos is

paramount in Daoism, a concept termed 'connecting with Heaven and Earth', and compassion is one of the fundamental ways to achieve this state.

Humour

To find humour in as many aspects of life as possible, no matter how difficult they may be, is important because it enables difficult concepts to be looked at and absorbed without producing major blockages and negative manifestations in the practitioner's Xing. Humour is dispersing; it has an energetic quality that causes the breakdown of stagnation.

Simplicity

A simple approach to life enables you to develop your Ming without too many external influences adding to the build-up of your acquired nature. It should be noted that Daoism didn't originally advocate a monastic lifestyle spent away from the rest of society; this was a later development in Daoism. Although hermitages away from society were required in order to cultivate your Xing, equally important were times spent within society. The highest-level aim was to remain with the same internal level of simplicity you could attain in isolation while living among society. This was known as reaching the state of remaining 'like an uncarved block'.

Wu Wei

The Ming paths of every living creature on the planet are intertwined like some great cobweb of Karmic connections. At countless stages in our Ming we cross paths with the people we encounter, meaning that each and every encounter we have has the potential to change the path of our Ming and lead our life in a different direction. This places a great level of importance upon how we act and what we say to each other. We have a responsibility not to negatively impact upon the life of others around us; this is the concept of Wu Wei, to 'not govern' the Ming of others. We should aim to impact the Ming paths of others as little as possible, unless we make a conscious decision to, and then it should be done in the most benevolent manner possible. This concept should then be applied to our own Ming path as well. There is a flow through the space between Heaven and Earth that we should be following; when following this flow, we should cultivate our being but not buck against flow of the Ming as this is said to be going

against the 'mandate of Heaven'. This is generally the aspect of Wu Wei that the majority of contemporary writers have focused on.

Release of the De

The virtuous De are explored later in further detail. These are the congenital manifestations of the five spirits when they are expressed through a pure Xing. When the De are expressed, the external methods of Xing cultivation can be dropped as they are no longer required. This is the ultimate aim of the Xing aspect of Daoism: to reach the level whereby the precepts can be dropped because natural evolution of Xing to the point of virtuous expression has been reached. Be warned, though: the external methods should not be dropped for a long time. I have met few people, if any, in my life who I believe have managed to fully express the De through the congenital aspect of their Xing, yet I have met many practitioners who have decided to ignore or drop the external ethical guidance of Daoism.

INTERNAL METHODS OF CULTIVATING XING

The internal method of cultivating Xing involves working with your Xin through various methods. Your Xing is the external expression of what is taking place within your Xin. This concept is shown in Figure 3.1.

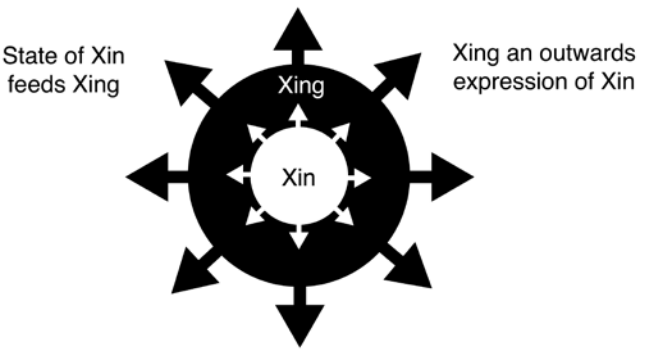


Figure 3.1: The Xin and Xing Relationship

Over the course of your life, the Xin is in a perpetual state of flux and movement. This in turn begins to build up ever-increasing layers of acquired mind which bury your true Xin, the seat of your consciousness. When your Xing is expressed through the layers of acquired mind, it becomes distorted,

and this hides from you the truth of who you really are at your centre. In order to find your centre, it is important to be able to still the Xin. This enables the layers to begin to break down and the acquired mind to begin to fade away. The *Dao De Jing* refers to this metaphorically as 'allowing the muddy waters to settle through sitting in quietude'.

The Xin is an expression of the relationship between your mind and your consciousness. This is conceptually explained in the Xin or 'Heart-mind' model shown in Figure 3.2.

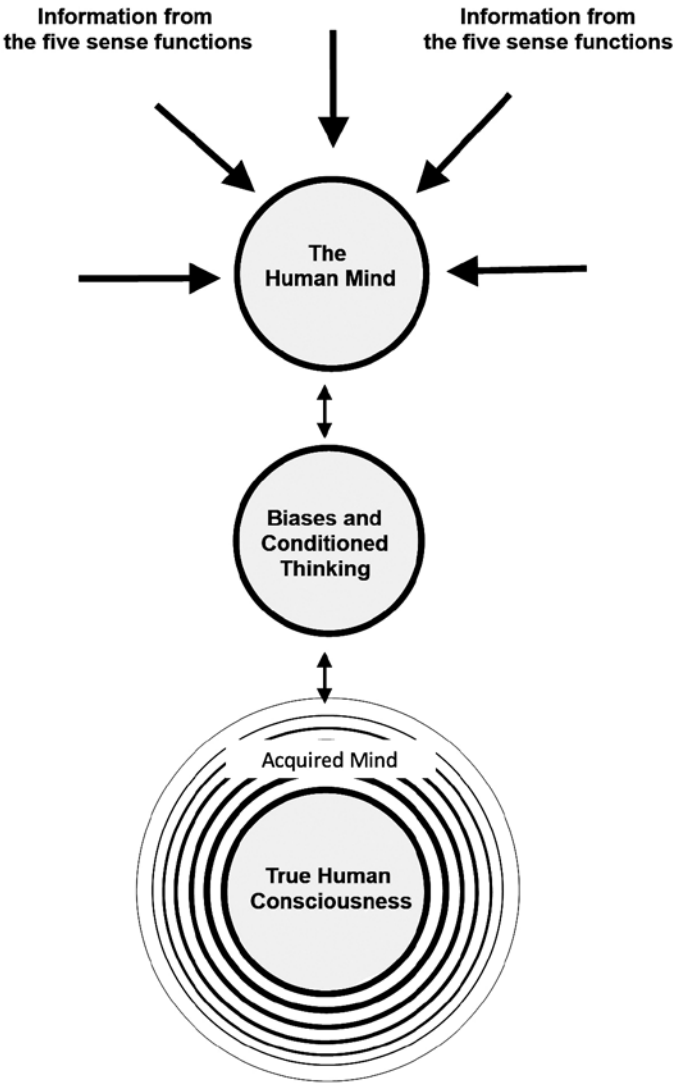

Information from the five sense functions
Information from the five sense functions
The Human Mind
Biases and Conditioned Thinking
Acquired Mind
True Human Consciousness

Figure 3.2: The Xin Model

When I use the term 'mind', I am referring to the individual aspect of thought processes and cognition that we develop as we move through our life. It is the part of our psyche that we identify with and the part through which we experience the world and the various interactions that take place over the course of our daily life. 'Consciousness' is the innate potential for deep inner stillness which connects us into the great collective potential of Dao. Consciousness sits behind mind and operates through it and yet the majority of people never fully contact their consciousness to any great degree. Mind is always subject to change and shifts, whereas consciousness is still and constant.

In the Daoist tradition we have something called the 'five thieves'. The five thieves are the five sense functions of sight, smell, touch, taste and hearing. The understanding of the five sense functions is somewhat different from that of Western biological sciences; in Daoist thought, each sense function is also considered to be an aspect of mind, an expression of human acquired thought and a way in which the mind interacts with the outside world. They are said to thieve from us as they draw in information for the mind which then uses this information to build layers of acquired thought, burying our true consciousness deeper and deeper, preventing us from realizing our innate potential. When alchemical texts discuss silencing the five thieves, they are referring to shutting off the senses through silent sitting so that the mind is temporarily starved of external information.
When the five senses bring in information from the outside world, the surface layers of the human mind process this information much like a computer receiving data. This information is then passed through a large filtering process which is the stage of moving through our 'biases and conditioned thinking'. This is an important thing to understand as it is practically impossible to draw in anything through the sense functions without this filtering process taking place. Our biases and conditioned thinking are a result of every thought and interaction we have ever had, and they will attach to any information that is brought into the mind from the outside world.

BIASES AND CONDITIONED THINKING

The Daoists refer to the state of our biases and conditioned thinking as being the state of 'self'. To be removed from them is to reach a state of 'no self'. If we want to understand this concept, then we need to understand the role of the mind and its need for self-identification. In short, true

consciousness is not able to function within the material world. It is empty of concept and construct, and does not find importance in dealing with mundane physical issues. True consciousness is born from the power of Heaven and has little to do with the Earthly realm. While it can powerfully connect with the divine, it does not understand how to cook a meal. The role of true consciousness is to serve as a connection to Dao, and the mind's role is to then function in service of consciousness. The mind is more than capable of adapting to the world around it and gives us a way to function within the physical realm. The problem lies in that the adaptations of mind will begin to distort every experience we have and any information that the sense functions bring us.

The mind enables us to function by building us a concept of 'self'. If we look at a newborn baby, it has little sense of self. It has little to identify with, but as it begins to grow up, this situation changes. The process of building a 'self' is through learning. This is the stage of mental opposition when a person begins to learn what is good and bad, what is nice and what is unpleasant. Preferences quickly begin to dictate behaviour, and cravings and desires begin to creep in. The mind learns what it prefers and thus begins to build a sense of self around it. These are the early stages of developing the acquired mind. On top of this come lessons from parents, teachers, society and our peers, as well as media and a thousand other sources. We learn to identify with the things, places and people around us, and more and more layers are built up on top of the consciousness which becomes buried more deeply. Throughout all of this the mind is building its strength and we are developing a stronger sense of self-identification, something that is ultimately going to make our alchemical practice even more difficult. With increasing age and responsibility come more layers, and now politics and belief structures become involved. More and more layers are built up.

Everything within the realm of existence has an energetic component to it and concepts are no different. Every thought you have carries energy or Qi with it because it is just a form of information, a vibratory pattern. In the case of mind, much of this energetic baggage takes the form of emotional energy. This is why so much emotion is attached to our thought patterns. Emotional energy becomes the glue that holds the layers of acquired mind together. This is why people can become so emotionally involved when something causes them to question their belief structures. The mind uses your emotional energy to hold its layers in place. Because of the power of emotional energy, the mind will begin to seek out increasingly emotionally

charged experiences because it knows that these can then be used to further build its sense of self-identification, which it is always working towards. This is the reason for so many people's obsession with observing or taking part in emotionally charged situations and dramas. The media understands this and fuels our emotions with its programmes so that we become more addicted to what it is showing us. If you want to understand the nature of emotional energy and how it binds everything together, just go to a class of internal practices that have a degree of depth to them. As the layers of mind begin to break down, it is common for these emotional energies to begin releasing and students may cry, laugh or shout – a common phenomenon in Daoist alchemical practices.

THE DISTORTION OF THOUGHT

As the information taken in from the five senses moves through the layer of biases and conditioned thinking, it begins to distort. Previous experience stains the information you are taking in until it is almost unrecognizable from its original form. This information then adds to the layers of acquired mind which further bury true consciousness. The reaction to the information is actually born from true consciousness. Remember that true consciousness is largely part of the great collective; it is devoid of any sense of self or individualization. This means that your thoughts are not your own; they are not yours to claim ownership over. Instead, the movement that comes from true consciousness passes out through the layers of acquired mind, which distort it further; it is these distortions that are yours. More biases and conditioned thinking are added to this thought as it moves through to the mind and then from here you develop a reaction to the external stimuli. This process is shown as a flow chart in Figure 3.3.

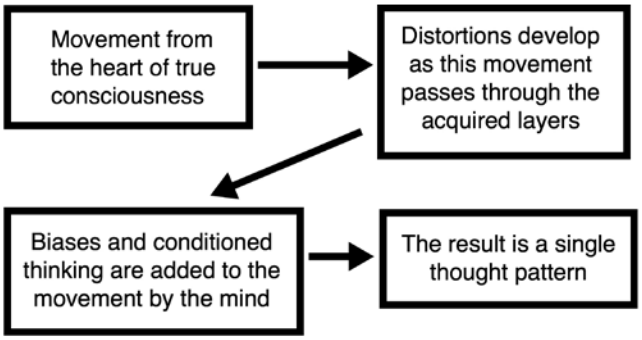

Movement from the heart of true consciousness
Distortions develop as this movement passes through the acquired layers
Biases and conditioned thinking are added to the movement by the mind
The result is a single thought pattern

Figure 3.3: The Distortion of Thought

This means that a great deal of delusion is involved with every thought and action that we take on a daily basis. It is no wonder that the state of the world can often seem so chaotic and fuelled by negative emotional energies when we are always self-identifying with such a confused mind.

The overall state of the mind and consciousness and how they relate to each other is your Xin. This is what we must seek to change. The way in which the Xin then expresses itself to the rest of the world, and indeed to yourself, is your Xing, your nature.

RELEASING THE ACQUIRED MIND

Many of the stages of practice within Daoist alchemy involve working with various elements, including your breath, your awareness and your energy, in order to try to still the Xin. If the Xin can be stilled, then the acquired layers can begin to dissolve because they rely on perpetual movement and new experiences in order to exist. The term for this taking place is Zuo Wang (坐忘), which can be translated as meaning 'sitting and forgetting'. Interestingly, the character for Wang, 'forgetting', shows the character for Xin being hidden from view.

As the layers begin to break down, many aspects of mind that you self-identify with begin to fade away into irrelevance. Unfortunately, many of the attachments that people have are very powerful and so the mind can resist releasing them for some time. Figure 3.4 shows some of these attachments.



Figure 3.4: Acquired Attachments for Self-Identification

What happens is that, as practitioners learn how to enter increasingly deep levels of internal stillness, their attachment to the layers of mind begins to lessen and so we see a gradual process of change starting to take place. In short, I have observed three major stages of releasing the layers of acquired mind, which are as follows:

- The first layer to release seems to be emotional issues. Recent hurts and traumas, which the body intuitively knows are bad for it, are released out of the energetic matrix. As people move deeper into their practice, increasingly buried emotional energies are brought up and let go of. As the emotional blockages are freed from the body, this enables the energetic flow to smooth out and the mind to become more at ease. With increased training, it is this process that causes a practitioner of Nei Dan to be less emotionally driven. States of emotional extremes lessen and a sense of clarity becomes the norm.
- The second stage of acquired layers that are released is to do with societal norms and expectations. These can potentially be life-changing for you and those around you as people can change careers and make major adjustments to their lifestyle as they realize that societal norms and pressures had pushed them into a life they did not want. You should always be aware of this being a risk when beginning any form of deep inner work; the transformational process can hit you on many levels.
- The third stage of acquired layering to be shed is to do with your belief structure and the concepts that are strongest in your identity. These can include religious beliefs, national identity and deeply held views.

LETTING GO

When writing this book, I had originally planned to discuss the process of letting go of attachments to the layers of acquired mind in great detail. Only when I began writing about the Xing did I realize that this was not really necessary. I believe that it is enough to understand what the process entails so that you can develop a working understanding of the nature of Xing and Xin. If you then engage with the practices, this unfolding process will take place on its own anyway, making an excessive amount of writing on the subject somewhat superfluous. What is important to understand is that any engagement with Nei Dan will begin this process, providing you persevere

with the training. For me, many of the concepts shown in Figure 3.4 came into question. The irrelevances of gender, age, social class and nationality began to show themselves, along with countless other concepts, as the layers began to fall away from me. This process is still unfolding and it has been the most transformative aspect of Daoist training and, in many ways, the most difficult for the people around me.

One aspect of 'letting go' of the layers of the acquired mind worth discussing is the idea that the acquired aspect of your mind may not wish to shed some of the layers that you have built up. Many facets of the acquired mind developed in order to strengthen your own sense of self-identity. It is a curious aspect of human nature that we subconsciously strive to develop as strong a self-image as we can throughout the majority of our life. This may be through our work, our national identity, our opinions or an infinite number of other ways. In many cases these layers, which we so strongly identify with, were built as a reaction to some kind of hurt that we experienced in the past. Maybe somebody said something to belittle you, perhaps your heart was broken by an ex-lover or maybe some imagined slight was caused by somebody from a different culture or religion? In these instances a negative emotional reaction was generated within the acquired aspect of Xin. This negative emotional reaction then moved through the various layers of your Heart-mind and began to form into a layer of psychological defence. Thus the acquired mind was strengthened and your sense of self-identity grew. In order for that layer to begin to 'let go' and dissolve away, there has to be a severing of the emotional bond that holds it in place. This can be difficult, especially in the case of aspects of acquired nature held in place by the emotions of fear and sadness. By taking away the various layers they are bonding to you, these emotions become exposed. This results in either a release of emotional energy or an ardent refusal for the layers to move. This then halts your progress for the time being as the layer prevents you from moving closer to the true consciousness at the centre of the Heart-mind. All of these layers must come away through the alchemical process you are undertaking. The importance of this process is understood in many Eastern traditions; Buddhists are well known for telling you to simply 'not attach' to anything that comes up in your sitting practice and Daoists exhort the virtue of simply 'shedding everything'.

An interesting side effect of this process is that as well as finding a sense of great relief in 'letting go' of the acquired mind and its emotional bonds, we also develop a greater sense of empathy for other people's conditions. The reason for this is that empathy only really grows from developing an

experiential understanding of the nature of something. Through releasing layers of the acquired mind we actually begin to realize how many of our layers are held in place by the emotional energy of insecurity. We actually sit and watch as the layers of negative emotions release and let go of many of the 'isms' that we all have. These 'isms', in their most extreme form, are facets such as sexism, racism, ageism and classism. In their less extreme forms, they are slight discomforts that we have intellectually when interacting with people who are clearly not the 'same' as us. Once we have seen the basis of our own 'isms', we actually grow to develop sympathy for the state of those around us who express such anger and hatred within the world. Although we may never agree with such states of mind, they do not anger us as we can see from which part of the human psyche they are born. We can begin to see how their Xing is based in these layers of self-defensive acquired mind. It is this kind of realization that accounts for the peaceful mass opposition to world conflict that is so often demonstrated by practitioners of Eastern meditation. This is the process of 'opening the Heart', even in the face of negativity. It is the basis for true compassion and a prerequisite for stilling the Heart-mind enough to begin moving into the higher stages of Nei Dan.

EMOTIONAL RELEASES

No discussion of the nature of 'letting go' through internal practice would be complete without a discussion of the nature of emotional releases. No doubt, many people reading this book will have taken part in workshops where people were having some kind of emotional release. This is the process of the acquired mind weakening to the point at which the emotional 'glue' that holds these layers together begins to release from the energetic matrix of the practitioner. This results in a sudden rush of emotions in the form of tears, laughter or any number of other kinds of emotional response, which often comes as a real surprise to new practitioners. These are all a part of the natural process of 'letting go' inherent in any transformational work. I have seen these releases taking place in classes of Yoga, Qi Gong and all sorts of meditative work as well as in various religious settings. When a group of practitioners are working together, the nature of the work can sometimes be much stronger than people expect. I was teaching a course on Nei Dan at the releasing stage of the process in Mid Wales several years ago. There were about 50 people in attendance at the foot of a large waterfall, far from the nearest town. During the course I took the participants to the stage of emotional releasing and it hit a peak that was far from what

most people would associate with meditative work. The vast majority of the people in the room were shouting, thrashing about and exhibiting all manner of extreme reactions to the release of the layers of the acquired mind. Unfortunately, a new student had come along and was expecting a quiet meditation retreat, the sort that tends to take place in health spas. Out of all the chaos taking place within that room it was actually his shocked facial expression that I remember most!

The kind of release described above is not absolutely necessary in Nei Dan training, and in actual fact that was a particularly crazy course where we were focusing in on that specific aspect of the practice. It is more normal in a group of students for there to be a couple of individuals quietly crying or trying desperately to hold in the urge to laugh out loud for fear of disturbing the rest of the group. During your practice these reactions are not necessary but they are quite likely. If they come up, don't worry; simply acknowledge what is taking place and then continue with your practice. If you give the emotional release too much thought, then you run the risk of giving substance to the emotion, which will make it more difficult to let go. You should always see the release of emotions as nothing more than a useful body function which is activated during meditative training. There is no need to analyse the memory or event that sits behind the emotional release as this will not help it come out in any way. The release of emotions should be sudden and brief. They should be let go as suddenly as they come up because this is the fastest way to progress past this stage into deeper levels of working with the acquired mind.

HEAVEN AND EARTH

The nature of Xin is that it is divided into its two aspects: the congenital consciousness and the acquired mind. Outside of this, the expression of the relationship between these two aspects is the Xing, our nature. The classically understood model of the nature of Xin is the interaction of the five spirits, while the externalized movement of Xing is largely the expression of the emotions. The emotions themselves are forms of Qi which move through our body system, and so now we have a model for understanding and working with the 'substances' of our psyche. This is the basis for the formation of the alchemical pill of 'true silver' from the reversal of the course of the Xing; this advanced stage will be returned to in Chapter 9. In short, this is the stage of working with the more ethereal aspect of our body, the Heaven-related mind-based elements of Daoist Nei

Dan. The second aspect to be aware of is that of Ming, the Earth-based element that roots the Xing into the realm of existence. These two work together to form mankind as shown in Figure 3.5.

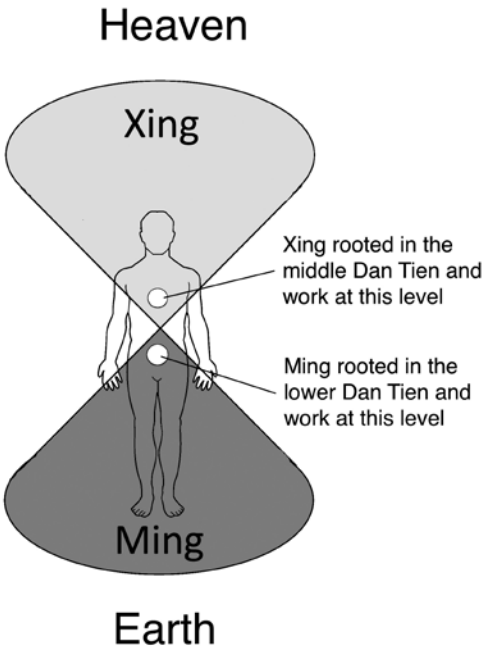

Heaven
Xing
Xing rooted in the middle Dan Tien and work at this level
Ming rooted in the lower Dan Tien and work at this level
Ming
Earth

Figure 3.5: Xing, Ming, Heaven and Earth

Through Nei Dan training we aim to work equally with these two aspects of human existence. This is the key to locating the true alchemical agents which make up the elixir that Daoists have sought for generations. When the alchemical agents have been formed from Xing and Ming, it is said that 'Heaven and Earth can come together' and that 'true silver and true gold have been generated'.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HEALTH

Ming, as discussed in Chapter 2, is the path we walk throughout the duration of our life. It is the route that is formed for us by our actions, choices and the level of connection we have to the Ming of Heaven. It manifests through our health and, in particular, the strength of the Kidneys as they are understood in Chinese medicine. It is because of the requirement for a balance to exist between Xing and Ming that health maintenance principles became so important in the Daoist tradition. These principles include how to eat

properly, how to exercise and even how much sexual activity to engage in. There is a vast amount of teaching in the Daoist wisdom tradition covering these aspects, which went on to inform arts such as Qi Gong and Chinese medicine.

When we begin to practise Nei Dan, it is important that we look at the nature of our health. If we ignore our health and allow it to weaken, then we will be trying to build our practice upon a poor foundation. Nei Dan is not a casual form of meditation; it is a life choice for those who wish to really go towards the deepest levels of the Daoist tradition. If a person is not prepared to take on board the health aspects of the tradition, then they should not be engaging in alchemical training. When we begin to start the 'firing process', we will be moving various sources of congenital information throughout our energetic system. This information will carry with it the sum of our Ming and everything we have done to affect its state. If we are living an unhealthy lifestyle, then this will be transferred throughout our system and ultimately shorten our lifespan. Remember, the path of our Ming is greatly affected by the level of health of our body, the vehicle we use to travel along this path. If we heighten our level of connection to the base level of health of this vehicle, then we have the potential to either massively increase the quality of Ming or greatly damage it. I think that is a very important message to get across to anybody who wishes to engage in alchemical training; too many teachers do not state this clearly enough and this is a real injustice. I have personally watched as people get heavily into alchemical training without changing the food they eat or the way they live. Within a few years of training Nei Dan, their health had deteriorated to a high degree. The Kidneys were forced to work harder to nourish a system that was running in a poor state and so they became deficient in Kidney energy within a short space of time.

The energetic mechanics of Ming are quite simply based around the health of the Kidneys and the rest of the Kidney system, which is discussed at various points throughout this book. There is a great deal of manipulation of the Kidney-associated substance of Jing within Nei Dan, especially at the level of the 'firing process', which is the key aspect of the training for working with and consolidating the Ming. This is the foundation of health transforming upon which the rest of the alchemical process is built.

THE INTERTWINED NATURE OF XING AND MING

Although it is true that both Xing and Ming must be understood and worked with individually during the Nei Dan process, it is also the case that the two are far from independent of each other. Xing and Ming essentially work together to create what we commonly call in the West the 'mind–body connection'. Since mind has a direct effect upon the state of our body, we can say that Xing influences our Ming. In the same way, Ming influences our Xing because the health of our body will adjust the state of our mind. This is the basic principle upon which Chinese medicine and indeed the majority of alternative therapies are based. Xing and Ming can only begin to come together alchemically once the mind and body are working in harmony with one another. This is the key aspect of all meditative practices as well as internal arts such as Qi Gong and the internal martial arts.

In Nei Dan training we are essentially trying to change the way that our Xing works so that we reverse the refraction process that our mind goes through when we move from the congenital to the acquired state of being. This then produces an experience of the original 'substance' of Xing, which is a silver/white light perceived in the darkness as we sit in our practice. The quality and usefulness of this light will vary, depending upon the level of stillness within our Xing but also the quality of our Ming. If the Ming is not as balanced as we can possibly make it, then the light of Xing will be hazy, poorly formed or impossible for us to 'harvest' (a high-level stage in alchemical practice). In this way the health of our Ming may hold us back; the foundation of our physical body and its connection to the realm of Earth has prevented us from attaining a connection to true consciousness. With regard to the harvesting of our Ming, in order to do this we must still the movements of the acquired Jing in order to perceive a golden/yellow light, which is the 'substance' of our connection to the realm of existence. This alchemical agent will not appear if the acquired mind has not been stilled to the point of causing the emotions to stop having strong negative effects upon our body's health.

From this we can see the importance of working on our physical state of well-being as well as our emotional health. These must be the starting points for any transformation work in the tradition of Daoism.

SUBJECTIVE WRITINGS

Throughout the rest of this book I have tried to include my own personal experiences of the various phenomena that can occur at each stage in

the practice. I have done this because few books seem to include these experiences, despite the fact that oral instruction from a Daoist alchemist often includes these guidelines. Although in many cases the experiences that students have fall into the same broad category, there are always going to be subjective differences in these phenomena. This is because each experience is only a vibrational wave of information which is then interpreted by the mind into something that we can perceive and so understand. The differences in interpretation of these experiences will mean that subjective differences will occur from person to person. For example, I have outlined in this book a stage that feels as if there is a gentle breeze blowing from behind you. This was my personal experience, but in classical teachings this has also been described as being like a 'strong wind is blowing on to your head', 'the sound of wind behind the ears' and even a 'bird flapping its wings behind your ears'. From this we can see that although there are clear similarities, making the experience easy to identify, each practitioner had a slightly different experience that warranted a different description.

There are arguments for and against the listing of experiences at each stage in the training. The positives of doing this is that it gives students a clear signal that each stage should come with a definite sign of progress. It also enables those who have had similar experiences and not known why to see what may have been happening to them. I originally started to write like this because I was talking to many practitioners around the world who were experiencing unknown things and starting to become confused and even scared. I saw that there was little in the Daoist tradition that included this kind of written information and so decided to put a book together; this was the birth of my first book.

The negatives of this way of putting across information is that it can cause students to begin actively to look for these experiences as signs of progress, which is not the right way to progress. Remember that these have been my own subjective experiences and those of my students and peers. These experiences may vary from your own because of the subjective nature of the translation of the brain. For this reason you should use these books as guides but go on your own journey rather than seeking for each experience to be exactly the same.

Meditation traditions based solely in the cultivation of Xing will not usually discuss experiences at each stage because the nature of Xing is that it can be completely individual to each practitioner. However, much of alchemy is based in Ming, certainly in the early stages. Ming-based phenomena will always be a little more constant from person to person as

they are based in a more tangible energy, which is quite 'Earthly' in nature. This is the biggest strength of alchemical-type meditation systems and yet at the same time their biggest trap: cultivate Ming but do not become stuck in it.

Chapter 4

THE ART OF SITTING

Nei Dan is a form of seated meditation. Like other forms of meditation, Daoist alchemical training requires that the practitioner be seated, usually in a cross-legged position, with their spine erect and the body as correctly aligned as possible. For many this can be the first challenge. Newcomers to sitting practice will find it one of the most difficult aspects of internal training. The reason for this is that for any real progress to be made it is important that practitioners are able to sit comfortably and correctly without moving while they work on the various internal processes inherent in Nei Dan. Realistically, the absolute minimum length of time that it is worth sitting and working on Nei Dan training is 30 minutes, and ideally a person will aim to be able to sit for up to an hour without any major discomfort in their body. This can take some time to build up to if you are not used to sitting in a cross-legged position, but the perseverance is necessary.

One thing I do not believe in when writing is shying away from pointing out realistic timescales to people. Nei Dan is not a basic-level practice and certainly not a simple form of meditation that people can pick up and put down easily. It does not work as a simplified system of meditation to be used for general relaxation like so many other forms of modern meditation that have been created. Nei Dan is a method of systematically working through various energetic transformations in order to lead a person towards Dao. This requires diligence and commitment. I have come across Nei Dan teachers in the West who tell their students that they can practise alchemy by only sitting for 10–15 minutes at a time, but they are kidding them. The energy body takes time to work through the various practices, and short sitting sessions will not be long enough to achieve any real and

lasting results. Short 10–15-minute practices of sitting are useful only for preparing the body, as we are going to discuss in this chapter, but they are not adequate lengths of time for the next stage, which is the beginning of the 'firing process'.

THE ART OF SITTING

The first thing to understand when approaching sitting is that you need to really engage with a study of the nature and alignment of your own body in order to attain a high-level sitting posture. You will require a certain degree of looseness in the joints, a high level of flexibility in the hips and good core strength for holding your spine erect for the length of time required for Nei Dan practice. When I am teaching newcomers to Nei Dan, this is my first concern. I always advise them to stretch out their bodies as this will make the process of learning to sit much easier. It is beyond the scope of this book to discuss how to stretch the body, but it is easy to find instruction on this elsewhere. Attending a local Yoga Asana class for a while when you are beginning your Nei Dan training can help you to stretch the body and mobilize the joints. Prior practice of Qi Gong to soften the body is also useful because a stiff person cannot easily learn how to sit.

We then have various sitting postures that can used for Nei Dan practice. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses, but they all adhere to various principles designed to ensure that the posture is most effective when beginning the Nei Dan process. In brief, the various sitting options are discussed below.

Using a Chair

Beginners are advised to use a chair when they begin their practice. The major advantage of using a chair is that it is the least demanding posture for the body. Even those with tightness in the joints can start their practice through the use of a chair. The major disadvantages are that the perineum is not close to the floor, which is very important for the 'firing process', and that the energetic structure of the hips does not support upwards conversion of energetic substances. Figure 4.1 shows the 'chair sitting posture'.



Figure 4.1: Chair Sitting Posture

Note that the back of the chair is not being used in this position. The spine should be erect and unsupported for effective Nei Dan practice. The hips should be slightly higher than the knees, so a suitable chair must be chosen for this. The seat of the chair should be hard, not soft, as this ensures that the hips do not sink into the cushion, resulting in a misalignment of the pelvis. The feet should be shoulders' width apart and placed so that they are directly below the knees as shown in Figure 4.1.

I advise the use of a chair in this manner for the early practices of Nei Dan while you work on conditioning the body correctly for sitting on the floor. Realistically, experience has shown me that the vast majority of people can progress to sitting on the floor for Nei Dan if they work daily to condition their body for doing so. This gives a good six months or so of working on the basic breathing exercises prior to the 'firing process' while using a chair. This is a good amount of time for the sincere practitioner to work through the preliminary stages before progressing to direct work with the lower cauldron.

Cross-Legged

Sitting cross-legged as shown in Figure 4.2 is the most basic of the floor sitting postures for Nei Dan practice.



Figure 4.2: Cross-Legged Posture

Sitting like this has the advantage of bringing you close to the floor, which is useful in initiating the 'firing process', but it has several weaknesses. It compacts the lower body and misaligns the hips, giving a poor physical base and a weak energetic root to your practice. It does enable you to stretch up the spine, but in essence it is little better than the chair posture for effectiveness. It is, however, a useful intermediary posture for moving from a chair to the floor.

Half Lotus Posture

The posture shown in Figure 4.3 is the posture commonly known as half lotus posture. This posture is the first of the more demanding positions for newcomers to sitting.



Figure 4.3: Half Lotus Posture

Half lotus posture enables you to apply the various body alignment principles discussed below into your sitting practice. The spine can be held erect, the chest can be sunk and the hips can open up. A strong base is built and the energetics of the posture will assist in establishing an upwards flow of internal transformation. The openness of the hips pulls on various internal connections, which will help the lungs to open up and in turn slow your breath. In order to get into this posture, ensure that your hips are higher than your knees, as shown, through the use of a supportive meditation cushion. Place one foot as high up on the opposite hip as you can and tuck the other leg in.

The major weakness of this posture is that your body will be uneven due to one hip being higher than the other. The lack of symmetry means that you must be careful in this posture. In order not to develop an energetic weakness on one side of your body, it is important that you periodically switch which leg is placed on to the opposite hip.

Burmese Posture

The posture commonly known as Burmese posture is shown in Figure 4.4. This is a very powerful posture for the early to intermediary stages of Nei Dan training.



Figure 4.4: Burmese Posture

Burmese posture opens up the hips and enables the spine to stand erect. In order to get into this posture, ensure that your hips are higher than your knees through the use of a meditation cushion as shown. Fold one leg in and tuck it in close towards your groin. If men wish to add to the power of this posture, they can tuck the closest heel in further so that it applies a little pressing force to the area at the root of the testicles. This will help with the movement of Jing that takes place in the 'firing process'. Women need not worry about this detail.

The flaw of this posture is once again its lack of symmetry. You should ensure that you switch which leg is drawn close to the body regularly. I advise changing sides with each sitting session that you engage in.

Kneeling Posture

This is the posture many people will know by its Japanese name of Seiza (正座) posture. This is the position shown in Figure 4.5.



Figure 4.5: Kneeling Posture

This posture is used extensively in Japanese culture, Japanese martial arts and Japanese Buddhist meditation. It is also used extensively in some lines of Chinese Daoist sitting. I have included it here as many newcomers to Nei Dan may have practised meditation using this posture elsewhere. I do not find that it is particularly useful for Nei Dan beyond the earliest stages, though, due to the lack of openness of the hips. The shape of the posture is fine for more consciousness-based meditation styles, but for Nei Dan the work with the Jing and the 'firing process' is almost impossible with the knees folded under the body like this. I would advise learning to move away from this posture as quickly as possible for Nei Dan training. This also includes the variant of Seiza that people practise using a small wooden bench to support their weight.

Full Lotus Position

Full lotus is the most demanding sitting posture for meditative practice and it should be approached with respect and caution. This is the posture shown in Figure 4.6.



Figure 4.6: Full Lotus Position

The hips should be elevated slightly off the floor, as shown in the image. They should always be higher than the knees. Fold the first leg so that your foot is high up on the opposite hip. The second leg is then folded over the top of the first and again the foot is placed as high as possible up on the opposite hip. The feet should be placed so that their bases face up towards the sky. This has long been known to be the most effective position for Nei Dan training; there are some lineages that require mastery of this posture as a prerequisite for even beginning alchemical training with them. It is, however, extremely difficult if you have not been practising this posture since childhood. If you experience any pain whatsoever in this posture, then back away from it. It is very easy to damage your body through incorrect and overly forceful use of full lotus posture. I would advise a great deal of preparation and stretching over a long period if you wish to try to use this posture for prolonged Nei Dan practice.

The advantages of this posture are that the hips are fully open and the energetic structure of the shape is very powerful. The perineum is close to

the floor and the spine can be held erect. There is full expansiveness within the body and this enables the lungs to open fully in a downwards direction.

Beginners should start with sitting in a chair while they prepare the body and from there gradually move on to sitting cross-legged and then through the various positions discussed above. The combination of stretching the hips, together with the relaxation that comes from meditative training, will gradually make the other postures available to you. Progress slowly and do not force anything. Many people have injured themselves in Nei Dan practice through forcing their bodies into postures that they were not ready for. In past times teachers would tie their students into the correct posture and leave them there for a number of hours to force their muscles' memory to change, but thankfully those days are gone. Listen to your body and work with it to lengthen and relax the correct muscles until each posture becomes comfortable. Think in terms of months rather than weeks and years rather than months for the time needed to progress through each position.

PRINCIPLES OF SITTING PRACTICE

As with all Daoist arts, the physical body is very important. It is the physical structure of the body that provides a home for the energetic matrix as well as an anchor to the realm of existence for the human spirit. If we do not apply various bodily principles to our practice, then we have fallen at the first hurdle. These principles are designed to ensure that our 'default' flow of Qi within the body is going in the correct direction and that transformative work is taking place in an upwards direction.

Aligning the Spine

The first important aspect of Nei Dan sitting is that the spine should be stretched upwards and erect. It should be aligned so that no weight from your head and shoulders can be felt anywhere in your body. If the weight of your upper body is projected anywhere into your structure, it will create muscular tension as your muscles have to compensate for the weight that your skeletal structure should be holding up. In order to get a feel for this principle, you should sit with your head forward and your spine slumped, as shown in Figure 4.7. I have shown this from a 'floor sitting' posture but it can also be practised in a chair.



Figure 4.7: Slumping the Head and Spine

Begin by tuning in to your body and feeling where the weight of your head and shoulders is being held. Various muscles should be engaged in the torso to hold the weight of your skull. When you have found the tension from the weight of your head and shoulders, stay with it as you slowly 'stack' the vertebrae on top of each other one at a time from the bottom up. This is shown in Figure 4.8.



Figure 4.8: Stacking the Spine

Keep stacking the vertebrae on top of each other one at a time until you are upright. This should take you to the optimum point at which the weight of your head and shoulders vanishes. You should feel light and as if the body is almost 'floating' upright. If not, repeat the exercise a few times and keep

refining it until you find that weightless state. When you have managed it, you have found your optimum sitting position with regard to the spine.

With the weight of your head and shoulders no longer bearing down on your spine, your back can relax and the intervertebral spaces can begin to increase in size. As these spaces widen, it creates more room for energetic flow through the back, which is important for the first few stages of Nei Dan training. Many people carry their body in an imbalanced manner for the majority of their life, meaning that the intervertebral spaces are compressed. The fluid-filled discs between the vertebrae should act a little like shock absorbers; if they are held in compression for long periods of time, however, they lose their springy quality and the spine becomes habitually compressed. This reduces Qi flow and creates tension in the muscles of the back. Through correctly aligning the spine in this manner you help to reverse this process. Do not be surprised if you experience quite intense pain in the muscles of your back in the early stages of Nei Dan sitting practice. As the muscles begin to release and the tension fades away, it can be quite uncomfortable.

Suspending the Crown and Sinking the Chest

An important principle when sitting is 'suspending the crown and sinking the chest'. This principle ensures that the correct directional force is set up within the structure of the body. This will help with the 'small water wheel of Qi', which is awakened in the early stages of Nei Dan training. The first aspect of 'suspending the crown' is easy enough, providing it is done correctly. The head must be gently stretched upwards to free up the cervical vertebrae. Ensure that you lightly stretch upwards from the correct point on the top of the head as shown in Figure 4.9. Many people automatically raise their head from the incorrect point, which is further forward than it should be. This causes compression in the neck and leads to a blockage of Qi flow along the Du meridian.

The head should be lifted upwards from this point so that the neck ever so slightly stretches. It should not be pulled to the point of being tense, but at the same time not relaxed to the point of being slack. This has to be held for long enough that it becomes an automatic postural alignment which does not collapse when you start to relax into your Nei Dan practice. It is a common error for the head to slump forwards when people are new to meditative training, and this gets in the way of effective energetic flow.

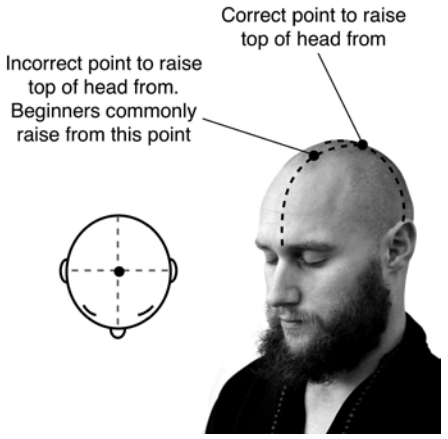

Correct point to raise top of head from
Incorrect point to raise top of head from. Beginners commonly raise from this point

Figure 4.9: Suspending the Crown

The balance of the stretching up of the top of the head is the 'sinking of the chest'. This should never be mistaken for 'rounding the chest', which is a common misconception. We never wish for a rounded shape in the shoulders with a collapsed chest as this leads to unnecessary tension and sinking of the Heart's Qi. Sinking the chest involves allowing the Tian Tu (天突) (Ren 22) meridian point to gently be released downwards. This release wants to be very slight; a drop of a couple of millimetres is enough. This causes the Qi within the abdominal region to begin gently moving down towards the lower abdomen while letting go of tension around the Heart centre. The Ren meridian also sinks down a little, which directs the second half of the 'small water wheel of Qi'. This is all shown in Figure 4.10.

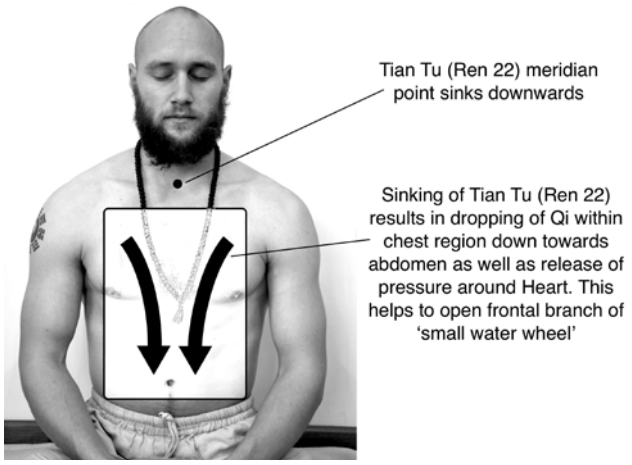

Tian Tu (Ren 22) meridian point sinks downwards
Sinking of Tian Tu (Ren 22) results in dropping of Qi within chest region down towards abdomen as well as release of pressure around Heart. This helps to open frontal branch of 'small water wheel'

Figure 4.10: Sinking the Chest

When the crown is elevated and then combined with the sinking of the Tian Tu region, it results in a coupled raising of the back channel and releasing of the front channel, which results in a slight muscular link, taking the form of a circuit as shown in Figure 4.11. This is the muscular basis for the 'small water wheel of Qi'.

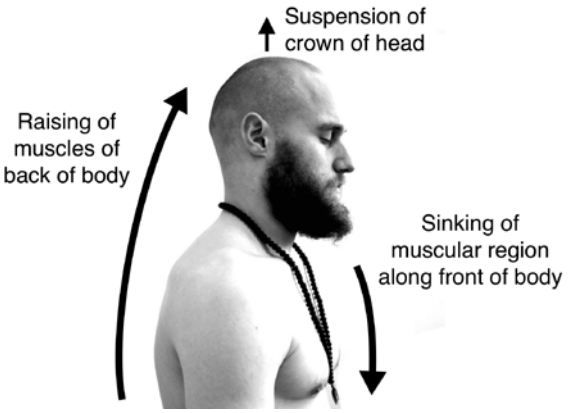


Figure 4.11: The Muscular Link of the Small Water Wheel of Qi

At first this position can feel a little unnatural, but within a short space of time your muscle memory will change and this will become a natural way to hold your body. Just ensure that the stretching and releasing of these two points is gentle and not forced. The movements should be small; only a little adjustment is required to get the desired result. Many of the people I have met who have had blockages along these two lines have caused them by making the adjustments too large or too forceful.

Opening the Abdominal Region

It is important when sitting that we do not compress any regions of the torso. A common error is allowing the weight from your upper body to sink down and compress the inside of the abdominal region. As well as placing pressure upon the internal organs here, it also stagnates the Qi and slows the rotation of the lower Dan Tien, which we need for the 'small water wheel of Qi'. When understanding this principle, it should be remembered that the lumbar region of your spine is actually slightly back in your body, not in the centre. Figure 4.12 illustrates this principle.

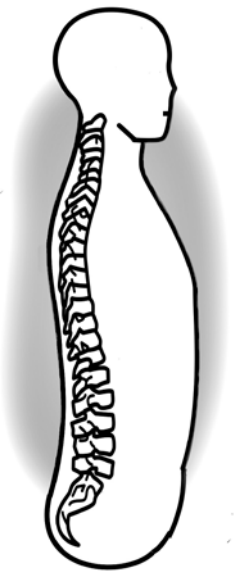


Figure 4.12: The Location of Lumbar Spine in the Lower Abdomen

You should ensure that the ribcage does not collapse towards the pelvis as this will create stagnation and we wish to avoid this. In order to ensure this does not happen, you should make sure that the muscles in your midriff are slightly stretched. These are the muscles shown in Figure 4.13.

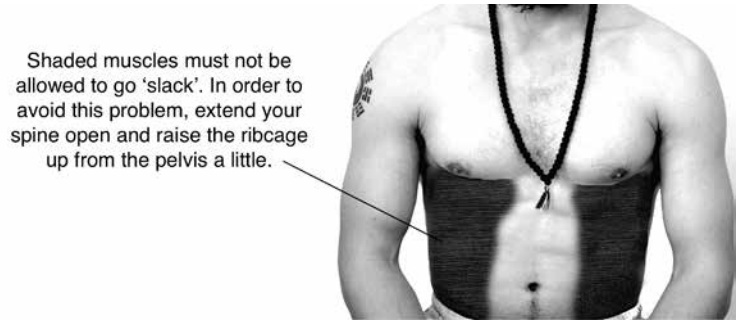

Shaded muscles must not be allowed to go 'slack'. In order to avoid this problem, extend your spine open and raise the ribcage up from the pelvis a little.

Figure 4.13: The Muscles of the Midriff

Note that the sinking of the Tian Tu point will create a slight sink on the front of your abdomen as shown, but the muscles to the side of this want to be slightly raised. This can take some practice; in order to get it right, remember that the muscles should only be slightly pulled. If you use an excessive stretch or too much tension, then you will distort your structure and create blockages.

Opening the Hips

The inside of your hip joints should be gently teased open during all 'floor sitting' postures. This should be achieved through a simple feeling of stretching gently open from the inside of the hip region as shown in Figure 4.14. This will ensure that there is as little tension in these joints as possible.



Figure 4.14: Opening the Hip Joints

In many of the sitting postures (with the exception of sitting cross-legged) there should be an attempt to get the lower part of your legs in contact with the floor; for half lotus posture this should only be one leg, whereas in Burmese and full lotus postures you should have both lower legs in contact with the ground if you can. This ensures that the hips are fully open. This is also assisted by raising the hips up on a meditation cushion. The hips are a major energetic thoroughfare; if they are closed, then there is little communication between the lower and upper parts of your body. Your body is your workplace for alchemical changes; the more open you can make it the better.

Tongue to the Roof of the Mouth

The resting place of the tongue is very important in Nei Dan training. For meditation systems based solely around working with your mind, the location of the tongue is not a major factor. With systems that work with energetic substances and rotation of various orbits, our tongue position is very important. Different locations of the tongue actually help to open different circuits, but our default position is designed to help connect the Ren and Du channels into the key 'small water wheel' orbit. In order to locate this position, simply say the word 'tut'. The place where your tongue falls at the end of this word is the correct location for the tongue. This

should place it upon the roof of the mouth where it can rest comfortably. This should also be a fairly intuitive location for the tongue to move to when it is left to naturally rest.

This location in the mouth is the internal connecting point of the Ren and Du channels. If the tongue does not rest here, then there is the risk of Qi moving up into the head and then not being able to sink back down again. This may result in various degrees of internal pressure which turn into migraine-type headaches and problems with the eyes.

A fairly simple check for the connection between the Ren and Du channels can be carried out by running your tongue backwards and forwards along this region of the roof of your mouth. If the roof of your mouth feels cooler than the rest of the area, then the connection point is blocked; if it is clearly warmer, then the connection point is open. Make sure you have not eaten or drunk anything for an hour before doing this exercise because the temperature of your food and drink can make the results misleading. If the connection point is closed, then do not engage in any of the Nei Dan practices that raise energy up through the core of the body. You do not yet have the required safety valve of the recycling circuit of the 'small water wheel of Qi'. This means you are running the risk of doing yourself harm. Continue with earlier practices until this connection point opens up for you.

The Energetic Pyramid

One important aspect of the various 'floor sitting' body postures is the effect that they have on the energetic field that surrounds you. This field of information governs the general direction of flow within your body and dictates to what extent you exchange energetic data with the world we live in. In the early stages of training it is normal for people to be unaware of this field, but as you move deeper into your practice, your mind learns how to tune in to various deeper frequencies and the auric field begins to open up to you.

When we sit in a good posture with a solid base formed with our legs and hips, we cause a condensing of the Qi within our auric field near to our ground connection. As we then stretch up the top of our head, we create an upwards movement from this base and our auric field begins to reshape itself to match the structure we have formed. Figure 4.15 shows the pyramid shape of the auric field that forms around us when we sit in a good posture for Nei Dan.



Figure 4.15: The Energetic Pyramid Structure

As we progress into our practice, the central thrusting aspect of our congenital energy body opens up and this strengthens the upwards lifting force of the pyramid. Its pinnacle eventually rises to reach the top of our auric field a few inches above our head, and this is when our energy field has been successfully conditioned to enable a powerful connection with environmental forces during our training. Interestingly, the outer edge of the auric field can be clearly seen by those who have practised for a long time during group sitting sessions, and it becomes particularly strong when it forms a pyramid shape. It can also be seen on occasion in photographs taken of people practising Nei Dan, as in the case of the image shown in Figure 4.16. This photograph of Roni practising Nei Dan several years ago was taken in Laos in a dark room with no sources of light coming from the windows. You can see the edge of the auric field's pyramid structure as a white outline starting to form.

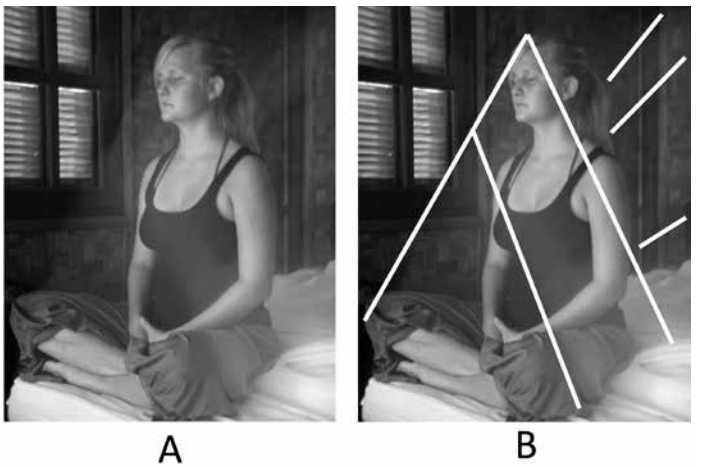


Figure 4.16: The Auric Pyramid

Image A is the original photograph; image B has lines added to show the shape of the pyramid being formed during her practice. Interestingly, this was Roni during the early stages of her practice and the structure of her back was not quite correct. This can be seen in the lines of the auric field being projected backwards from her body away from the peak of the pyramid where it is supposed to be directed. If you look at the shape of her shoulders, it is clear to see there her spine is not quite correctly aligned, which is why this energy is escaping backwards. Note that this error has since been corrected!

Cross-legged postures will build this pyramid shape but not to the same extent as the Burmese posture or full lotus, which are far more effective. When the pyramid is fully formed within the auric field, upwards conversion of energetic substances within the body is fairly simple and your energy body will naturally support your physical structure. This will cause your body to remain erect even when fully relaxed. Pain in the body can begin to vanish and long sitting sessions are no longer disturbed by aches in the muscles. In addition, there will be a small 'vacuum' of energy created at the peak of the energetic pyramid after some time. This 'vacuum' serves to draw up energy from the base towards the peak of the auric field as energy will naturally move from areas of high pressure to low pressure. This becomes important for raising vibratory forces up through the body at the intermediate level of Nei Dan practice.

In Daoist cosmology the Earth was symbolized as a square, the Heavens a circle and mankind as a triangle extending upwards between the two. The square of Earth emphasizes the four directions which cosmologically make up the three-dimensional world of form. The roundness of Heaven represents the cyclical movements of the stars and seasons around us, a result of Heaven's Qi. When we form an effective Nei Dan sitting posture and form the auric field into an energetic pyramid, we assume the triangular pattern of mankind between these two extremes. This is often drawn as shown in Figure 4.17.

You will see this pattern appearing within the sacred geometry of Feng Shui (風水) buildings throughout China. Particularly good examples are the buildings within the 'Temple of Heaven' park in China. When constructing buildings according to this theory, the aim is to form the environmental Qi of the area into the same upwards-moving directional force.

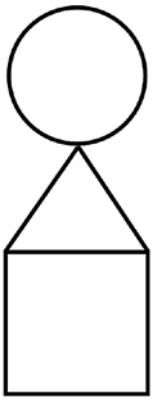


Figure 4.17: Earth, Mankind and Heaven

Closing the Eyes

Within Daoist thought, your spirit and your awareness are intimately connected with your vision: where your awareness goes, energy will follow. This is of particular importance in the early stages of Nei Dan training because we want our energy and awareness to go in towards the centre of our body. Much of our foundation work involves becoming familiar with the nature of our inner environment and this is much easier to accomplish with our eyes closed. At later stages in our training we can have our eyes open because we can separate our awareness from our vision to some degree, but in the beginning this is practically impossible. When closing the eyes, ensure that the eyelids lower gently and no tension is created in the face. If the face tenses, then the whole body will become tight.

Cushions and Supports

There are various ways to prop up your hips when you are starting out in sitting meditation practice. These props are essential to ensure that your hips are placed higher than your knees and that you can sit for a protracted period of time without your body going numb. Most practitioners seat themselves on a small cushion, which is fine, but note that you should never rest your back on any kind of upright support unless, of course, you are having to make adjustments to the practice in order to compensate for a physical injury. In addition, beginners or those with past injuries to the hips or knees often support one or more knees with small bolster-type supports to ensure that the leg can fully relax. That is fine as well. Although we

need to ensure that we are striving towards sitting with all of the correct bodily alignments present, we should also make sure that we are not sitting in extreme discomfort. It is no good beginning our practice if ten minutes into the sitting session we are having painful muscle cramps; this will make prolonged silencing of the mind almost impossible.

It is important to note that we should always have our supports and cushions made from the most natural materials that we can find. There is an energetic connection to the ground that we are seeking through our sitting posture and this can be negatively affected by having materials such as plastic or rubber between us and the Earth. This is particularly relevant because many students come along to courses armed with modern synthetic Yoga mats, which are about the worst thing you can place between yourself and the planet during meditation practice. If the weather is warm and the ground is dry, then it is good to have some physical contact between your body and the Earth, but this is often not possible. In this case, you should sit on a blanket. A simple blanket made of natural materials is best, or even an animal skin for those who are not morally against such things.

Clothing

While practising Nei Dan, you are going to be working with various energetic substances in the body. For this reason you should not wear anything that will interfere with the processes which Jing, Qi and Shen are going through during your practice. This means that you should have no metal jewellery on whatsoever or any pendants that include crystals, unless you are absolutely sure of the energetic properties of the crystal and that it is going to be beneficial for your practice. There should also be as little metal in your clothing as possible, so belts and zips on clothes should be taken into account and glasses should be taken off. The question always arises here of what to do about metal pins within the body after operations. The answer is that these are not ideal, but obviously there is nothing we can do about them. We can only do our best within the confines of what is possible for us. They will create varying degrees of energetic stagnation, but the body is generally quite versatile and will cope or redirect the energy along a different path.

Your clothing should be adequate for the temperature so that that you do not overheat or become too cold, and it should be loose enough that it creates no tightness anywhere in the body. Be aware that in the early stages absolute beginners can find that their body temperature drops a little

while they are getting used to sitting, whereas those engaging in the 'firing process' will become much hotter as the Jing is worked with. You should be aware of your stage of attainment and take this into account when selecting your clothing. During any energetic work there will be an increase in the level of opening of certain points on the meridian system. These points will increase the amount of connection you have to the environment and cause you to exchange your Qi to a higher degree with the outside world. What this means is that you will become more sensitive to environmental energies and so you need to protect yourself from these during your practice. Do not practise in a draught if you can avoid it as this can enter the body and lead to sickness. Particular importance should be placed upon guarding the knees, elbows, the back of the neck and the top of the head during Nei Dan practice. These areas of the energetic body are particularly prone to invasion from environmental pathogens, so students of Nei Dan should always cover their elbows by wearing long sleeves. They should also never wear shorts during their practice, and I generally advise a top with a loose hood unless you are practising in a warm environment. Some practitioners prefer to place a loose cotton blanket over their head during practice; this is fine. Many Eastern traditions advocate wearing bright red or yellow on the head during practice of meditation, especially during cold seasons. This is because all colours are forms of vibration, like everything else in the cosmos. Red and yellow produce an expansive movement of information, which works to counteract the invasion of environmental pathogens. Personally, I rarely practise in an extremely cold environment and so I choose to wear a hood rather than cover up with a blanket, although the colour is not very important to me, but you should adapt these principles according to the location you generally train in.

Location of Practice

In the early stages of your practice you should simply find a good location to train where you feel comfortable and you will not be disturbed. Try to choose locations that are simple, free from clutter and have as little technology in the room as possible. The area wants to be free of dust and have a good circulation of air. Of course, you can actually practise anywhere, but it is best to choose a location that is going to add to the process rather than detract from it. Most people will be using a room in their house, so it is wise to use a location that feels good for you. If you are really serious about beginning a practice of Nei Dan, then take the

time to adjust your living space so that you have an area that is suitable for alchemical training. Try to use the same area each time because you will begin to build an energetic resonance within this space that will aid in your progress. Turn off as many electric lights as possible; instead, illuminate your space with candles as they will not interfere with your energetic field. If you are training outdoors, then there are countless variables involved in choice of location. Each and every place on the planet has its own energy, a unique source of information that will be transferred into your energetic system during your Nei Dan practice. For this reason, a complete discussion of the energetics of outdoor practice would take up an entire book on its own. The energetics of an outdoor location depend largely upon the three treasures of the environment and how they relate to each other and to your own three treasures of Jing, Qi and Shen. The three treasures of Heaven are considered the sun, the moon and the constellations, and the three treasures of Earth are fire, water and wind. The Daoist study of these elements is Feng Shui, which actually becomes a major aspect of Daoist energetic study for those who move beyond the early stages in any internal art. For the purposes of this book I will give some brief pointers on what to take into account when practising outdoors, although there is a great deal more to consider when choosing an outdoor practice place. Generally, a practitioner's intuition becomes much more refined after some time of practice anyway, meaning that they will automatically know whether or not they have found a good practice spot.

- Try to avoid extreme weather conditions if practising outdoors; if you must train in them, ensure that you wear appropriate clothing. Any invasion of environmental energy can cause stagnation or depletion of Qi, which will make practice difficult.

- Large bodies of water have strong effects on Qi within an area. Remember that you are trying to work towards forming your auric field into a pyramid shape so that it can aid in your practice. This takes time and therefore bodies of water such as lakes, rivers or waterfalls should be avoided in the early stages of practice. Lakes and the ocean can draw energy away from you into the distance, which is actually quite useful at later stages in your practice but problematic in the beginning. Especially important is not to have your back to a lake or the sea while you practise as this can actually drain your Jing to a certain degree. Rivers have similar effects and can also destabilize the root of your auric base, so you should not

sit too close to one in the early stages of your training. Waterfalls are a slightly different matter as their effects can vary depending upon the stage you are at and the actual properties of the waterfall itself, which are quite unique. Until you reach the level of intuitively understanding the nature of the environment, I would avoid training beneath or near to them.

- Trees are generally really helpful as they naturally encourage an upwards movement of energy, which is easily transferred into your own system. For this reason, practising in woods and forests is generally a good idea. Many practitioners of meditation have attained transcendence sitting beneath a tree and for good reason.
- Mountains and hilltops are great places to absorb rising energy, but of course they also tend to have more extreme weather conditions, so choose your location cautiously. Long considered the best location was inside a cave high up on a mountain as it is possible to harness the mountain's energy but still be sheltered from the weather. Caves also have extreme Yin energy inherent within them, which is great for helping to silence the mind.
- Something that is obviously not a part of classical teachings but I feel should be added here is the effect of practising in an area where there is Wi-Fi or similar types of wave. Sadly, it is quite difficult to get away from areas with phone access, wireless internet and so on because so much of the planet seems to be bathed in them. Human beings are foolish to think that all of these waves we put out into the air are not harming us; of course they are. We are natural parts of the great spiritual entity of the planet and we communicate with our world via vibratory information. Any waves in the environment will change the way in which we energetically function. For the stages of refining the awareness to the level of Shen, it is important that we try to find an area free from as many of these waves as possible because they prevent the mind from reaching the required state. This is an advanced stage, though, which generally requires being away from society in retreat anyway, so it is not a major concern in the early stages of your practice.

These are just a few pointers to help you find a good location for practice, but do trust yourself and go with what feels right to you, especially when you have practised long enough to develop your intuition to a higher level.

Time of Practice

An important aspect to get to grips with is the fluctuation of Yin and Yang throughout the day. Different times of the day have different relationships between these two poles and a skilled practitioner can capitalize on these energies. The shifting of Yin and Yang throughout the day is shown in Figure 4.18.

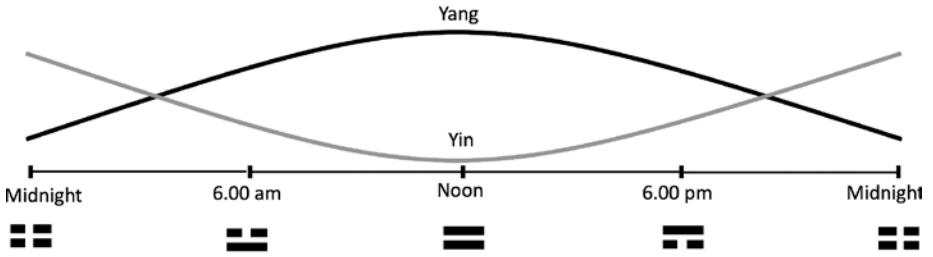


Figure 4.18: Daily Yin Yang Fluctuations

Different amounts of Yin and Yang dictate energetic activity, the level of the Qi within your energetic system and the activity of the mind. Although times of practice can be ignored, you will find that working with them improves your practice. Also, many people suffer imbalances to their health because they exist completely out of sync with the environment. Learning how to practise with the rhythms of the day can help you to move your natural state of being back in line with the environmental fluctuations of Yin and Yang, which can only be a positive for your level of internal harmony. Of course, many people will be trying to fit practice in wherever they can and so they find it very difficult in practical terms to take this aspect of the training into account. You can always only do your best within the confines of what is possible for you.

At midnight the level of Yin energy is at its peak and Yang is at its lowest. The few hours coming up towards midnight are considered the most still. This is the easiest time to learn how to still the mind and so is a very useful time to train when you are in the early stages. I have also had some of the most profound states of Wuji in my own practice at this time, especially if this hour is combined with a new moon. The combination of the two together makes entering into a Yin state much easier. Just after midnight, into the early hours of the morning, Yin is beginning to sink and Yang is starting to rise. This is a time of internal stirring and a great time to use the environmental energy to begin initiating internal change.

Many of my teachers advocated the early hours of the morning for Nei Dan practice. In the retreats that I run, my students practise from 11pm until 1am at certain times of the month, so that the peak of Yin is utilized as well as the stirring of Yang, which helps to bring about internal change. When I was starting out in alchemical work, I used to head to a local graveyard to practise at this time of night as I found it to be the most Yin environment for my practice. One teacher I had was horrified by this because of the risk of spirits entering the body, but I found it a very useful way to harness Yin energy. In general, the morning is good for harnessing Yang, meaning that most of the developmental shifts with regard to the 'firing process' are best worked on during the mornings. The evenings are a time of sinking Yang and rising Yin, meaning that stillness work tends to be easiest at this time.

The only time you should never really practise Nei Dan is around 11am until 1pm, over lunchtime. This is the point in the day when Yang reaches its peak and then begins to sink as Yin rises. It is considered an inauspicious time for training because Yang is unstable at this time. It can cause a collapse of the energy and damage the Jing, especially once you reach the stage of working to consolidate a foundation within the essence. I really would advise against practice between these hours as I have ignored this guidance in the past and then regretted it because there has been a clear drop in energy.

FOLLOWING THE BREATH: A COMMON PRACTICE

Realistically, if you are going to begin practising Nei Dan, there is going to have to be a fairly long period of preparation. That is, of course, if you are a complete beginner. Preparation for Nei Dan will involve learning how to sit as well as developing a certain level of regulating the breath and the mind. On top of this, a fairly accomplished level of Qi Gong ability is also recommended. I have met teachers of Nei Dan who have never engaged in either Qi Gong or Nei Gong training alongside their sitting practice, but, to be honest, they never seem to reach the same levels as those who have had prior or parallel training in these arts. If you are already quite familiar with meditative practices and have been practising internal arts for some time, then perhaps there is no need to go through the preparatory breathing exercises outlined here, but you should still always go through the '100 day virgin boy training', discussed in the next chapter, before beginning to work on the 'firing process'. This is an absolute prerequisite for the practice. I have taught quite a number of people the Nei Dan process and

only those who truly went through the 100-day preparatory stage got past the beginner's level in their practice.

Those starting out for the first time in any form of sitting practice should begin to work through the exercises outlined here. You should be patient and ideally spend a few months of regular daily sessions working on these exercises. If you manage to build a solid foundation here and then begin to prepare your body as well through stretching and Qi Gong training, then you will find the 'firing process' of Nei Dan much easier to get to grips with.

The first practice you should try is common to many schools of meditation training. This is the practice of 'observing the breath'. Different traditions will have their own versions of this practice; I favour the version of this technique known as 'Sung breathing', which is a form of 'observing the breath' that encompasses both the physical and energetic movements of respiration as well as the various releases that can come from the prolonged practice of the method. Sung (松) can be translated as 'the release of habitual tension from either the physical or consciousness realm through the vehicle of the energy body'. I covered this breathing method in my book *Daoist Nei Gong: The Philosophical Art of Change*. Here I will outline 'Sung breathing' once again, but with an emphasis on the aspects of the method that are most applicable to Nei Dan sitting practice. For a more detailed and complete discussion of the method, please refer to my earlier book.

SUNG BREATHING

'Sung breathing' is a method of using and observing the breath in order to help release stagnation from the body. This removal of stagnation then helps us to physically relax, ensure a healthy flow of Qi through the meridian system and free up emotional tension from the mind. In the beginning we focus on this practice, but after a while it becomes an automatic aspect of our everyday respiration. In this way, we begin to integrate the principles of our internal practice into our everyday life. We achieve this first by observing the nature of our natural breathing, then by changing it to the method that incorporates the principle of Sung; finally, we return our breathing back to our subconscious mind so that we no longer need to focus upon the practice.

Understanding the nature of tension is important for any practitioner of meditation because tension is essentially stagnation: they are one and the same. Nothing can exist purely within the physical realm; it also has to

have an energetic pattern and a spiritual component, especially in the case of facets of human existence. If there is tension in the physical body, then there will also be a related blockage in the flow of Qi as well as an aspect of the acquired mind that is 'stuck' and which relates to this tension. The generation of these imbalances can go in either direction: physical tension will transfer into the mind and mental tension will transfer into the body; this takes place via the medium of your energetic system which serves as a bridge between the two. This is demonstrated in the 'tension cycle' shown in Figure 4.19.

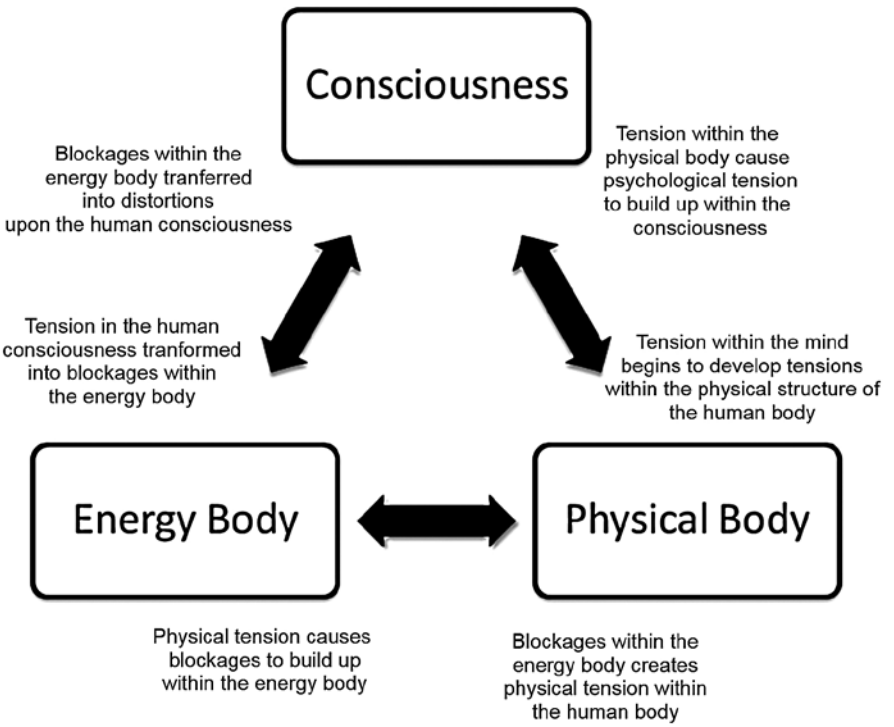

Consciousness
Blockages within the energy body tranferred into distortions upon the human consciousness
Tension within the physical body cause psychological tension to build up within the consciousness
Tension in the human consciousness tranformed into blockages within the energy body
Tension within the mind begins to develop tensions within the physical structure of the human body
Energy Body
Physical Body
Physical tension causes blockages to build up within the energy body
Blockages within the energy body creates physical tension within the human body

Figure 4.19: The Tension Cycle

By letting go of tension on any of these three levels, we 'break the cycle' that leads to the development of imbalance. When the body begins to let go of these blockages, we begin to find that sitting is much easier, our body is more relaxed, our health improves and the acquired mind begins to slow down. This is particularly important because your biggest difficulty in the early stages of Nei Dan training is going to be dealing with an overactive mind that wants to wander from its allotted task and a feeling of boredom that can creep into your practice. Boredom is a weakness of the acquired mind, a result of there not being enough stimulation for the acquired mind

to begin building more layers around itself. Only when boredom has been overcome through a process such as 'Sung breathing' will you be able to focus on your practice.

In the earliest stages of 'Sung breathing' practice you will notice tensions within the physical body beginning to ease away. These tensions disappear first from within the large muscle groups, enabling the body to realign itself through the extension of the muscles as they soften. From here we begin to relieve tension from within the semi-fluid connective tissues of the body, in particular the fascia. This region of the body corresponds to the classical Chinese layout of the Jing Jin (經筋) lines which serve as a riverbed for the meridian system flowing at this depth through the body. The deepest stages of physical relaxation involve releasing stuck tensions from the layers of fascia that surround the various organs. This is a deep stage, however, which takes many years of practice to reach. During this process of letting go of tension, stuck energetic pathogens are released. Old emotional patterns can also be released through the experience of sudden mood shifts during your sitting session. This is because of the multi-layered nature of existence and the direct connection between the three bodies involved in the 'Sung breathing' process.

As you grow used to the process, you will find that the tensions from the body as well as emotional baggage from within the acquired aspect of the consciousness body are leaving as a form of vibratory information. This is the passing of tension from the three bodies via the energetic realm as shown in Figure 4.20.

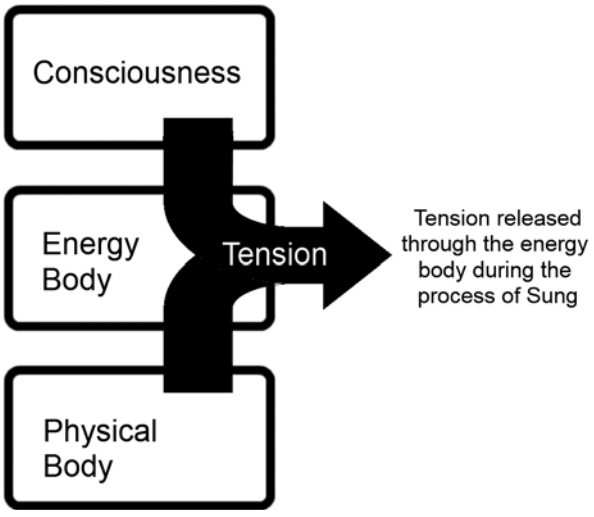


Figure 4.20: Releasing through the Energetic Realm

Before beginning to practise 'Sung breathing', it is important to become acquainted with the various physical mechanisms of your breathing. In order to do this, you should sit in one of the positions outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Choose whichever position you are most comfortable sitting in and lay your hands on your knees, with the palms facing the sky. There is no real need for any particular hand position at this level because you are simply trying to work with your breathing. Try to forget the outside world as best you can, relax and spend a couple of minutes getting comfortable. This might sound like an odd instruction, but I always believe that the mind is quite slow to adapt to any exercise you are doing. If you sit down and immediately begin with an internal practice, there is a moment of mental panic that seems to take place. The mind stiffens up against what you are trying to do and this makes the practice very difficult. You should treat the mind like a nervous animal and, when beginning a meditative exercise, simply sit at first with no real aim. Allow the mind to grow calm and settle into the fact that it is about to begin meditation and you will avert this mental panic that so often takes place. Only when you feel comfortable and ready to begin should you start working through the stages of practice outlined below:

- Begin by gently observing the movement of air as it enters and leaves your nose. Spend a few minutes here simply watching what is taking place without trying to make any judgements or changes to the process. Your mind should be an idle bystander to the process.

- Next, begin to move your awareness down into the chest cavity and observe what is happening as the air enters and leaves your lungs. Observe the expanding of the body in time with the lungs becoming full and then gently watch as the air leaves the body and your lungs contract once more. Again, try to make no changes to this process.

- Try to tune in to the movements of the diaphragm in time with the actions of the lungs. If you can, try to observe the change in internal pressures between the abdominal and thoracic cavities of the torso. If you can manage this, now begin to observe the whole of your body as you breathe, paying close attention to any muscular changes taking place in time with your breath. When you have done this for a while, you will often be surprised to find that your entire body moves with your breathing, from the tip of your nose right

down to the skin on the base of your feet. These movements are subtle, though, and it can take a high degree of relaxed sensitivity to begin feeling these whole-body respiratory movements.

While you observe all of this taking place, you should try to keep your mind as gentle as possible. If you are too intense with your observation, then you run the risk of tightening the breath, which can lead to stagnation of Qi within the body. Even a simple exercise like this can become negative if your mind is not able to relax and simply observe.

When practising this simple method, you should not try to stop any thoughts that arise or try to make any changes to the way in which you are breathing – there really is no need. The simple fact that you are giving your respiratory process the attention of your acquired mind is enough for it to begin adjusting itself. If you continue with this practice for several months, you will find that major changes begin to take place in the way in which you breathe. Your body will then begin to relax, the joints will open, tightness will vanish and your mind will begin to calm down. For many people, the body has been neglected by the mind for too long. The world we live in is always asking for the attention of our acquired mind to be drawn outwards. The disconnect that this causes means that imbalance begins to be created. Through this method we are allowing our mind to gently reconnect with the body. This in turn gives the subconscious mind enough time and space to begin making the adjustments to your inner state that it knows are needed.

At this stage in your practice you are getting used to the way in which you breathe as well as learning how to sit and developing the foundations of your Nei Dan practice. There is no need to sit for hours at a time while doing this. Try short sitting sessions for 20–30 minutes at a time, a few times a day if you can. Even if you never progress any further than this in your training, you will notice great benefits to your health.

Beginning the Releasing Process

You should continue observing the respiratory process until this exercise feels very relaxing. You will reach a point at which the mind is not so active and, when you breathe in, you feel 'fresher', for want of a better word. Your inhalation will naturally have become deeper and your exhalation smoother and more even. Now begin to take the mind off the action of breathing itself and instead begin to run your awareness over the surface of

your body. You should start at the top of your head and then gently bring your mind down in short runs right through to the ground. Do not force the mind; keep it light as if your awareness is just gently stroking your skin from the top of the head through to your base. It will not be long before you begin to notice one of three different reactions:

1. Some areas of the body will have feelings of pain or discomfort. These pains can vary from very sharp through to very subtle and slightly deeper – rather like gently pressing on a bruise. In the case of sharp pains, there is most likely something wrong with your sitting position or a medical issue that needs dealing with. You should try to deal with these issues in the most relevant way as 'Sung breathing' may not be adequate for this large an imbalance. In the case of bruise-like pain in the depth of the muscles, you are feeling an area of stagnation that needs releasing from the physical body.

2. The second group of sensations will exist within the energetic layer of the body. This means that as your mind passes over the area, there are sensations of unexplained cold, warmth, pressure, tightness or tingling. It is normal for your awareness to also become slightly 'stuck' on these areas, as though it is catching on something as it tries to pass by. These are areas of energetic stagnation that your awareness has tuned in to. If you gently become aware of the area of the physical body in the same location, you will likely find that there are some feelings of being bruised as well. It is just that your mental frequency has shifted from the physical to the energetic.

3. The third sensation is an area of stagnation within the consciousness body which corresponds to an aspect of acquired mind that needs releasing, The 'glue' that bonds this stagnation into the body is always emotional in nature, so connecting with this stagnation will result in the experience of an emotional shift. You may suddenly become slightly sad or angry, or start to smile. It is normal for students to reach this stage and begin to weep or laugh unexpectedly. This is nothing to worry about: your awareness is just touching upon an area of stagnation while being tuned in to the frequency of the consciousness body.

Continue to explore the body, making a mental note of any of these areas you have found. The body actually stores these tensions in the form of a

complicated web, meaning that one tension will often hide another. You may find that there are only one or two areas that need work. Through persistent practice you will clear these areas only to find that three or four more pop up. This is a result of moving deeper into the various layers of information of which your body is made up. Do not become frustrated at this; 'Sung breathing' is a process that is never completed!

When you feel ready, you can begin to release these tensions. Begin by gently placing your awareness over one of these areas and continue to breathe normally. Do not picture anything – no visualizations are needed. You should maintain your mind gently on the area, allowing your awareness to do the work. A special note should be made here to keep your awareness gentle. If it is too forceful, then you will lead extra energy to the area, which will actually increase the amount of stagnation. Your awareness should 'gently gaze' rather than 'stare'. With a little patience you will find that, once again, the subconscious aspect of your awareness knows what to do and gradually the blockage will begin to shift, resulting in the sensation in this area beginning to vanish. Once it is gone, then work through the rest of the body, becoming ever more refined with your awareness until you are eventually working on layers of tension between bones and around areas such as the eye sockets. All of this will help you in your ability to scan and direct information within the body for later stages of Nei Dan training.

A Change of Perception

Upon hearing the term 'observing the breathing', many people assume that it is referring to simply watching as your breath moves in and out of the body. Although this is true, there are also countless other layers to this process. In order to fully explore some of these processes, it is necessary for the mind to be able to change its level of perception so that it can follow some of the processes that are taking place within the energetic matrix of our body. This will actually begin to happen naturally and requires no real focus or method. Your mind and your breath are fascinating aspects of human existence as they seem naturally to be able to connect with one another. Your breathing can serve as a form of 'intermediary' between the physical and the energetic body as your awareness begins to wash over the three bodies and tune in to ever-increasing frequencies. As you 'observe the breath' for longer, you will naturally start to become aware of the nature of energy moving within your system. At first this takes the form of various tingling sensations along the surface of the skin, waves of

warmth flowing through the limbs and then small movements inside the body. At higher levels it enables you to become aware of the movement of the auric field. This is a useful stage of energetic sensitivity to reach. You will begin to feel that the field of energy surrounding you contracts inwards upon your inhalation and expands outwards upon exhalation as shown in Figure 4.21.

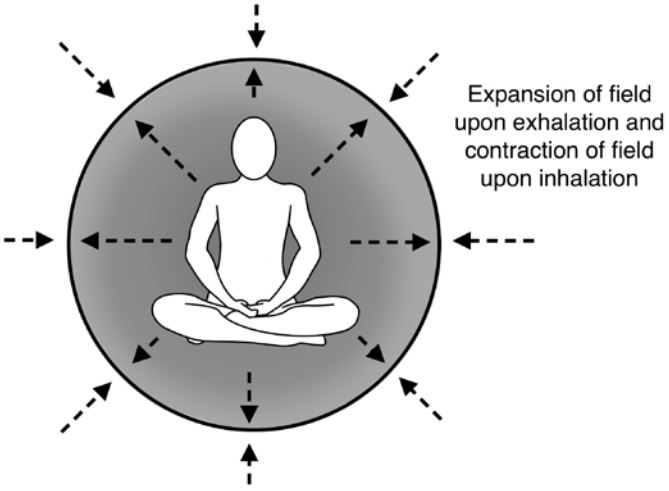


Figure 4.21: Breathing with the Auric Field

Once you manage to reach this stage, you should gently bring your mind to the external edge of your auric field. This should be as far as you can feel it because the chances of reaching the outer limits of the field using this method are quite slim. Now begin to strengthen your mind a little and gently tug out the auric field using your mind until you reach a couple of metres from your body. You will have to experiment to see how far you can go before losing the feel for the field. When you can stabilize your awareness of the field at some distance, it will begin to gently pull from the rest of your energetic system and the releasing process will start to speed up. Stagnation and tightness from the physical body will begin to rise in frequency so that it moves into the energetic realm and release from the body. This will happen much more powerfully on your exhalations when your breathing assists with the outward movement of your Qi. At later stages in your training, the auric field will begin to form into a pyramid shape as discussed previously; this releases pathogens downwards into the ground. This will take place far beyond the foundation stages of sitting practice, though, so is nothing to worry about at this level.

The Energetic Release

As energetic information begins to release through the process of Sung, you will feel various sensations of movements which can range from subtle to very strong. It can feel as if various breezes are moving through your body or as movements of cold or hot fluid. Electrical sensations can appear, along with any number of other unusual reactions. These are all types of Qi, information from the energetic level of your body beginning to release from your system. As they go, the body will relax more and more, making it easier to sit for prolonged periods of time. Once you reach this stage, you will find that you naturally wish to sit for longer periods and you should allow this to happen of its own accord. It is normal to get to an hour or more sitting and practising this method comfortably within a few months, even for a complete newcomer to internal work.

Because of the close relationship that exists between the physical and energetic body, do not be surprised if the body starts making involuntary twitches or shaking movements. These movements can be quite a surprise to those who have never experienced them before and are nothing to worry about. They are a result of the movement of energy from deep within the meridian system and will end when they are ready to. This is the spontaneous release of stuck Qi within the Daoist arts known as Zi Fa Gong (自發功). It is also normal for small emotional reactions to the process as well; this is also fine – do not worry, it is all part of the body shedding unwanted information through the process of Sung.

When you are ready to conclude your practice, bring your awareness back into the body and breathe normally. Stay like this for several minutes until everything has calmed down within your energy body and then conclude your sitting session.

During the process of releasing stagnation through 'Sung breathing' you should notice an improvement in various aspects of your physical and mental health. Despite these benefits, you may also start to experience something that feels like contracting a slight head cold. Do not worry about this as it is quite normal in the beginning. It should only last for a short time as it is a reaction to the body clearing out so many pathogens in one go. Just allow it to happen and return to the practice when you feel well enough to.

Throughout this process you will have been building the foundations for your Nei Dan training. This practice should form the basis of your training for several months if you are sincere in your wish to begin practising Nei

Dan. There are later stages in 'Sung breathing' that involve direct work with the frequencies of Heaven and Earth, but they are not necessary for Nei Dan training. If you wish to read more about this aspect of the process, please refer to my previous book, *Daoist Nei Gong: The Philosophical Art of Change*, which discussed 'Sung breathing' in the context of standing and moving exercises rather than Nei Dan. You should instead continue with this practice, enabling it first to clear out stagnation from your body and, second, to help your internal sensitivity increase. You will then find that naturally, as the stagnation is let go of and your level of awareness develops, your mind will begin to grow calmer. The erratic mental chatter, which you will no doubt encounter when you first begin any sitting practice, begins to lessen of its own accord. Although you do not need to attain complete stillness of the acquired mind, it is necessary to calm it down to a certain degree. Excessive mental chatter prevents you from adjusting the level of your awareness and distracts your awareness from working on more complex tasks. On top of this, a calmer mind is useful in the rest of your daily life as well.

ALCHEMICAL MUDRAS

Almost every system of meditation utilizes a wide variety of hand positions, which most people know by the Sanskrit name of Mudra. The use of Mudras has existed since for countless generations, with each generation of realized masters developing their own Mudras which were passed down through the generations to modern practitioners. Some of these hand positions are simple variations on open and closed fists; others use complex shapes created by combining the fingers of both hands into a single shape. While the workings of some of these positions are difficult to comprehend, the internal mechanisms of Mudras can be understood to fall into one or more of the following categories:

- At the simplest level, Mudras work by extending or collapsing various lines of connective tissue within the body. The extensions of many internal lines of connective tissue culminate at the ends of the fingers. Through developing an understanding of these lines, ancient teachers worked out that by placing the hands into various positions, the physical lines of the body could be opened up in different ways. These lines then pull right through to our core, meaning that each Mudra built this way allows Qi to rush to various locations.

- Some Mudras work by using placement of hands at different heights, combined with archetypal shapes that your subconscious mind will automatically recognize as being associated with a specific energetic function. These work by drawing your awareness into a particular shape or state, which then leads energy to shape itself in the same manner. Many of the most basic Mudras work in this way.
- A more complex level of Mudra works by connecting and disconnecting the energetic extremities of the channels running out to the fingers. By linking different fingers together into a ring-shape, certain meridians can be closed and looped together, while others are extended and allowed to flow freely. The various combinations generated in this way then bring change to the overall energetic state of the body, which a skilled practitioner of meditation can use at the correct time.
- Some Mudras are forms of internal ritual, in which a certain energetic mechanism is attached to a particular hand posture. These kinds of Mudra can work as a form of self-used auto-suggestion by a skilled practitioner of Nei Dan. In this way, a stage of attainment is attached to a hand posture, meaning that through the use of the Mudra the body understands what it is supposed to be doing internally. These become useful methods of taking yourself back to a previous stage in your practice. If you want to understand these Mudras in a slightly un-artistic manner, then you could see them as 'keyboard shortcuts' for meditation practitioners.
- The most complex Mudras are those that have been empowered by a realized master. Empowerment of a Mudra involves taking the combined energetic resonance of all of the practitioners who have previously used the same Mudra and then transferring it into an individual student. This requires direct mind-to-mind transmission, a phenomenon considered in Chapter 10. Using a Mudra will bring only weak versions of its functions unless you have been fortunate enough to have a high-level teacher transmit the empowerment of that Mudra to you. Many Mudras fall into this category, including the most powerful ones, which were often closely guarded by the various alchemical lineages of ancient China.

I use a fair number of Mudras within my own practice, although many are shortcuts to different states which can still be achieved without their use.

Some of these have been empowered but others fall into the more basic categories listed above. It does not seem very useful to include in this book anything but the most basic of hand positions as these are the only ones that can be learned from written instruction.

The Taiji Mudra

The Taiji Mudra is so named because of the S-shaped curve that it forms on the top of the connected hands. It is the most basic of the alchemical Mudras. It is designed to close off the energetic release points which sit at the centre of each palm. This raises the level of energetic expansion within the body which is useful for creating more heat, especially during the 'firing process'. Figure 4.22 shows the Taiji Mudra.



Figure 4.22: The Taiji Mudra

To form the Taiji Mudra, place your left thumb in your right hand so that the left thumb pad rests in the centre of the right palm. Now lightly close the fingers of both hands. Note that it is not really important for the right thumb to go into the centre of the left hand. The position is more than adequate to close off the palms, which is its aim. This hand position is then relaxed down into the lap. It is an easy hand position with which to relax the body and I would advise using this for the majority of your Nei Dan training.

The Fire Mudra

The fire Mudra is a variation of the Taiji Mudra and pretty much does the same thing. Some students prefer it, although I think it is slightly weaker than the Taiji Mudra as it does not focus the energy towards the lower Dan Tien region in the same way. Everybody is different, however, and some of my students prefer to use this hand position. Figure 4.23 shows the fire Mudra.



Figure 4.23: The Fire Mudra

This simple hand position is formed by placing the thumb of each hand into the palm and then forming a loose fist around it as shown. The fists are then rested upon the knees.

The Bao Yuan Mudra

The Bao Yuan (包圓) Mudra, or 'enwrapping circle' hand posture, is used to consolidate the lower Dan Tien. It works by bringing the mind more effectively down into the lower abdominal region. The shape of the hands then causes an automatic spiral within the energy flowing in the abdomen. It is a useful Mudra when trying to locate and bring the mind into the lower Dan Tien. It focuses the mind in this region but is not so useful for the development of heat. I would advise the use of this Mudra when trying either to focus the mind or to bring your awareness to the lower Dan Tien at any time. If you are struggling with either of these, then switch the hands gently to this Mudra for a good 15–20 minutes and you will find that your mind moves much more easily to the desired location. Figure 4.24 shows the Bao Yuan Mudra.



Figure 4.24: The Bao Yuan Mudra

To form the Bao Yuan Mudra, place the left hand into the lap, facing upwards. Now place the right hand on top and finally touch the tips of the thumbs together. Note that this is the masculine version of this Mudra; the feminine version would be the other way around, with the left palm on top. The difference between masculine and feminine versions of this Mudra is discussed below.

The Wuji Mudra

The Wuji Mudra is used to generate all-round expansion within the energy body. The shape of the hands encourages all of the body's tissues to lengthen slightly, which in turn begins to direct Qi from the core of the body outwards. It is a useful posture for any stage where you are attempting to expand the auric field and very easy to gain clear results. Figure 4.25 shows the Wuji Mudra.



Figure 4.25: The Wuji Yoga

Place the tips of all of the fingers and thumbs on to each other as depicted. Place this ball shape into your lap. Now gently stretch open all of the knuckles of the hands until you feel a slight pull through the tissues of the entire body. This should only be a very slight stretch and not enough to create tension. If you cannot feel the whole body pulling open slightly when you make this hand shape, then you have not yet relaxed the body enough to gain benefit from this Mudra.

The Sword Fingers Mudra

The sword fingers Mudra is one that you will often see appearing in Daoist temples. Many statues of the various deities are using this hand posture, as well as sages in the murals painted on the temple walls. The sword fingers Mudra works by pulling open the tissues that connect to the core of the body. As they extend upwards, they open the length of the central branch of energy running from the perineum to the crown of the head. This Mudra can be used any time you are trying to work with the Chong Mai. Change to this Mudra for a good 15–20 minutes whenever you wish to try to raise energy upwards along this channel. Figure 4.26 shows this Mudra.



Figure 4.26: The Sword Fingers Mudra

To form the sword fingers Mudra, place your left palm in your lap, with the palm facing upwards. Now curl your little and ring fingers on the right hand and place your thumb over them. There should be a little pressure between these fingers so that if you moved your thumb, the two curled fingers would flick open. Now extend the index finger and middle finger open so that they are completely straight. It is very important that these fingers are not bent in any way. You should aim to open the knuckles as if the fingers are trying to stretch upwards to the sky. Now place this hand in front of the middle Dan Tien as shown. Note that this is the masculine version of this Mudra; the feminine version would involve swapping the hands around so that the right was in the lap and the left was extending upwards.

Masculine and Feminine Mudras

Many teachers will talk of masculine and feminine versions of Mudras, meaning that men should use one version and women the other. This is an oversimplification and not actually the entire story. Masculine versions of a Mudra actually cause a slight expansion of your energetic body, whereas feminine versions slightly contract the energetic field. This matches the way in which men's and women's energy bodies naturally tend to flow. Male energetic movement tends to have a slight emphasis towards expanding away from the centre, while female energy bodies tend to have an emphasis on the contraction. The idea was that men should use the masculine version of a Mudra in order to bring its flow in line with what is a natural state for their energy body, and women should do the same for theirs by using the feminine version. In the majority of cases this may be true, but there are also some considerations we should take into account when using Mudras in this way:

1. First, the actual degree of movement of the energetic field during the use of masculine and feminine Mudras is not that great, unless you are using some of the more high-level hand positions which would need to be taught in person and then empowered. This means that if you use the masculine and feminine postures the wrong way round, it really is not the end of the world. Your practice will not suffer greatly.

2. Many people will find that they naturally prefer to use one version of the Mudra over another. In this case you should trust your intuition

and go with this version. Your subconscious mind will often tell you which is best for you at that time, even if it means that men are using the feminine version of the Mudra or vice versa.

3. At certain times men may wish to add to the contraction of their energetic field while women may wish to add to the expansion. In this case the masculine and feminine versions of the Mudra may be used accordingly. In the case of the exercises within this book, if you are having trouble developing heat, then make sure that you use the masculine version of the Mudra. If you are having difficulty bringing something upwards within the body, then use the feminine version of the Mudra. If there are no problems of this sort, then men should use the masculine version and women should use the feminine unless they intuitively know that they should do the opposite.

Moving Between Mudras

Mudras should be used in this way. Your basic position really wants to be the Taiji or fire Mudra depending upon which one you prefer. You can then gently move into the other Mudra for a period of time in order to help you accomplish an aim, but you should always aim to return to the first Mudra when you conclude your practice. Shifting too quickly between hand postures will not help you at all because the energy body will become confused with the clashing instructions it is being given. If you are using more than one or two Mudras per hour-long sitting session, then you are using too many. In the majority of cases, the basic Taiji Mudra is more than enough and I suspect that a lot of people will rarely need to use one of the other hand positions unless they become stuck at a particular stage in the practice.

CLASSICAL GUIDANCE

Included below are three lists of classical hindrances to development in Nei Dan. These lists were shared with new students in order to help them understand the effect that their mind and physical behaviours have on the energy body.

Damages of the Seven Passions

- Intense excitement disrupts the Heart
- Intense annoyance disrupts the Liver
- Intense grief disrupts the Lungs
- Intense fear disrupts the Gall Bladder
- Intense romantic obsession disrupts the Shen
- Intense hatred disrupts the Xing
- Intense ambitions damage the Stomach

Ten Damaging Behaviours

- Excessive walking disrupts the nerves
- Excessive standing damages the bones
- Excessive sitting stagnates the Blood
- Excessive sleep weakens the Qi
- Excessive fun damages your motivations
- Excessive 'looking at things' damages the Shen
- Excessive speaking damages the breath
- Excessive mental activity damages the Stomach
- Excessive eating damages the Heart
- Excessive sexual activity damages the Ming

Nine Weaknesses of the Qi

- Anger lifts the Qi
- Fear sinks the Qi
- Joy slackens the Qi
- Grief scatters the Qi

- Terror confuses the Qi
- Thinking stagnates the Qi
- Excessive work exhausts the Qi
- Cold tightens the Qi
- Heat spreads the Qi

Chapter 5

THE FIRING PROCESS

The first stage of moving from the acquired to the congenital aspects of your energetic make-up is known as the 'firing process'. This is the stage of moving from partial meditative work into full alchemical training. In order to understand this concept, we refer back to the chart of the formation of the San Bao within the body. This concept is shown in Figure 5.1. Here we see the movement from pure Yang through to Yuan Shen into Yuan Xi and then Yuan Jing. This is the congenital aspect of the San Bao. Beyond here, the congenital San Bao convert into the acquired San Bao and so we get the formation of Jing, then Qi, then Shen.

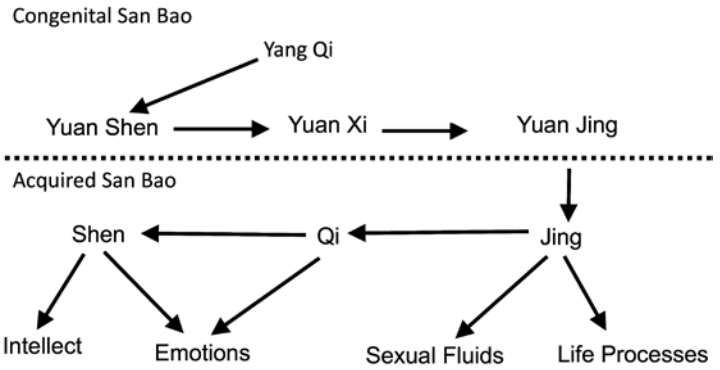


Figure 5.1: The Congenital and Acquired San Bao

The congenital aspects of the San Bao are the formative aspects of the congenital self which are so often hidden from us. The acquired manifestations of the San Bao are the children of these congenital aspects; they are in charge of governing the bodily and psychological aspects of self that we are generally more aware of. The congenital San Bao exist at a higher frequency of existence than the realm of manifestation, wheras the acquired are on the verge of manifesting.

Qi Gong practice is working almost entirely with the acquired San Bao while Nei Gong works with some of each and Nei Dan is almost purely congenital in nature. The crossover between these various arts can be understood by looking at the different stages of acquired versus congenital substances that they enable us to engage with. Qi Gong works primarily with the Qi, which flows through the meridian system and in and out of the organs of the body; this is acquired Qi, which is supplemented by acquired Jing. This then has a transformative effect upon the acquired Shen, which will calm and centre a person. Nei Gong works in the same way but also touches upon the more congenital aspects of the San Bao by accessing deeper energetic flows and more hidden aspects of human consciousness. Nei Dan works by penetrating straight through to the congenital San Bao: Yuan Jing, Yuan Xi and Yuan Shen. The relationship between these three arts is shown in Figure 5.2.

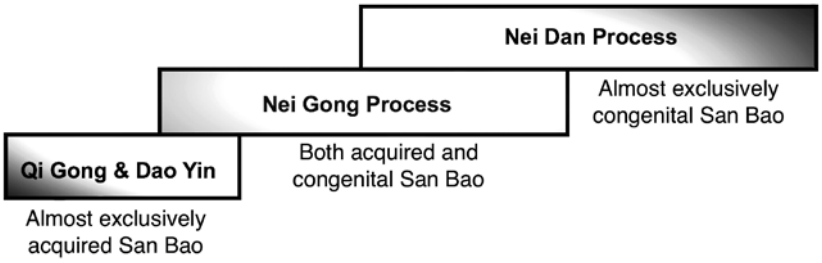

Nei Dan Process
Nei Gong Process
Almost exclusively congenital San Bao
Qi Gong & Dao Yin
Both acquired and congenital San Bao
Almost exclusively acquired San Bao

Figure 5.2: Qi Gong, Nei Gong and Nei Dan

In order to move safely and effectively through the alchemical transformations of Nei Dan training, a solid foundation should be built in the acquired stages before working with the congenital. The acquired establishes the quality of your workshop before you begin to work within it to form the alchemical pill of your true consciousness. For example, when I teach Nei Dan, I generally like my students to have gone through the following preliminary stages of development and preparation:

QI GONG TRAINING

- Regulate the body and soften the joints.
- Structure the body so that you can fully relax all of the major muscle groups.

- Work with your breath so that it becomes deep, long and smooth.
- Regulate energetic flow through the acquired meridians.
- Calm the mind as much as possible.

NEI GONG TRAINING

- Awaken the lower energy centre of the Dan Tien.
- Open the various congenital meridian pathways, also known as the 'extra-ordinary meridians'.
- Clear out as many energetic blockages as possible from deep within the channels through purging.
- Activate the early stages of the 'small water wheel of Qi' to ensure the safe recycling of energetic substances within the body.

These basic stages of development reflect a gradual movement from the acquired to the congenital stages of training. The better the foundation, the deeper people manage to go into Nei Dan alchemical training. I would advise anybody wishing to engage with the practices in this book to go and build a solid foundation in the arts of Qi Gong and Nei Gong before attempting any of the exercises from this point in this book. The exercises in the previous chapters are really preparatory practices and fall under the Nei Gong category of development rather than Nei Dan, and they are still working directly with the meridians. Preparatory work should involve at least several years of regular training in Qi Gong and Nei Gong as well as learning to sit as discussed in Chapter 4.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONGENITAL AND ACQUIRED

When the spark of Yang gives birth to the original consciousness of Yuan Shen, it is establishing the deepest and most formative aspect of your inner self. This is the basis for the development of sentient life and the core of your inner Xing or 'nature'. This is the blueprint for existence and the last aspect of our inner energetic substance that we must contact in order to move into union with the divine entity of Dao. As Yuan Shen begins to move through the realm of spirit, it transforms into the life-bringing

Yuan Xi – original breath. This is the congenital manifestation of Qi when it is too high a frequency to be considered a form of energy. This is the breath that animates every aspect of your being and the breath that we seek to temporarily still in order to enter into the profound state of Wuji, the doorway of the mysterious pass. As Yuan Xi grows still once more, it forms Yuan Jing, which is the congenital aspect of original physicality. Yuan Jing sits on the threshold between the congenital and the acquired realms; from here it condenses more until it forms acquired Jing. This is the essence that enters the realm of our body via the Ming Men area between our Kidneys.

The role of the congenital three treasures is to ensure that the potential for life is there, whereas the acquired treasures function to ensure that life moves through the various developmental processes that take us from birth to death. When understanding why we must build a foundation in the acquired stages, first we should understand this key difference in the congenital and acquired treasures roles. Building a foundation in control of the acquired treasures enables us to slow the process of decline by regulating their functions. This helps to establish the foundation of good health, which we then build upon with Nei Dan training.

THE MOVEMENT OF JING

The key component to take control of, if we wish to move our training into the congenital stages, is our Jing – our essence. It is here that the gateway between the two states is to be found, at the point of change between the congenital and the acquired. This principle is shown in Figure 5.3. This diagram shows the decrease of states from congenital Jing, which is potential, into acquired Jing, which then enters our system and begins the process of governing bodily processes, birth, growth and decline.

The natural movement of acquired Jing is to form into various bodily substances and fluids. In the case of men, this includes semen; for women, it is particularly strongly linked to menstrual blood. As men ejaculate and women menstruate, the Jing moves deeper into a state of decline and thus our potential for connection with the congenital essence is weakened. This is because, as the acquired Jing moves into a state of developmental process, it is in movement; the nature of congenital is stillness and so movement takes us away from this state of being. By returning the acquired Jing to a state of stillness, or as much as we can, we can increase our chances of contacting the congenital Jing through our Nei Dan training. In order to help with this, we should mark the commencement of Nei Dan training

with a process known as the '100 day virgin boy training'. This is a period of stabilizing the acquired Jing in order to help with the start of the 'firing process'. Note that although the name refers to a virgin boy, the process is equally applicable to women.

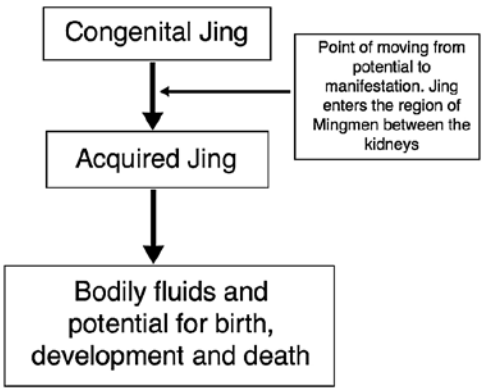

Congenital Jing
Point of moving from potential to manifestation. Jing enters the region of Mingmen between the kidneys
Acquired Jing
Bodily fluids and potential for birth, development and death

Figure 5.3: Congenital and Acquired Jing

100 Day Virgin Boy Training

There have been misconceptions over this term in alchemical texts, including one South East Asian Daoist group I came across who thought that this term meant that they needed to be massaged by virgin boys for 100 days. Thankfully, this is not the case; the term actually comes from the fact that complete abstinence from all sexual activity is a part of this training. It is said that 100 days without engaging in any sexual activity is how long it takes to fully stabilize the acquired Jing to the state it was in prior to having lost your virginity. This state of stillness is then used to start the 'firing process', which gives us a gateway to the congenital Jing.

In order to understand the process of the '100 day virgin boy training' we should first look at the movement of acquired Jing through the body. This is shown in Figure 5.4. This shows the raising of Jing through the three key Dan Tien energy centres.

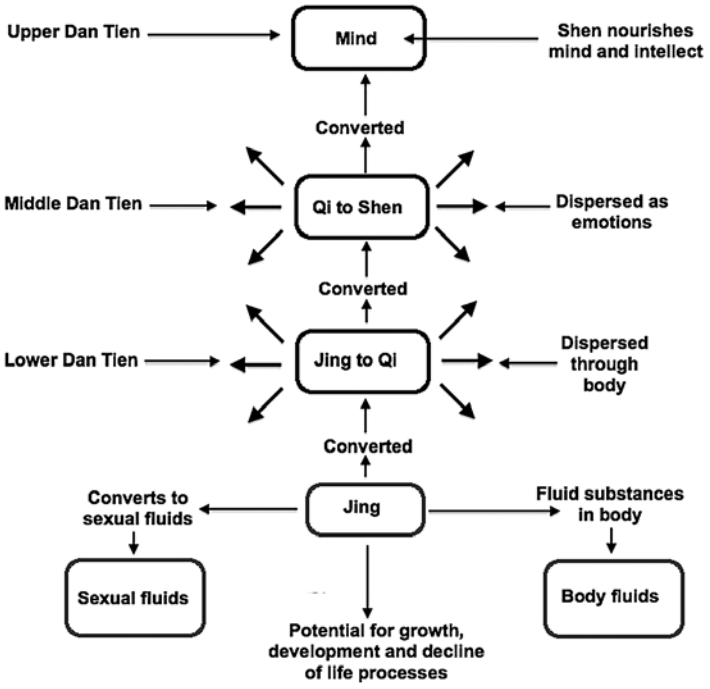


Figure 5.4: The Movement of Acquired Jing

At the bottom of Figure 5.4 are the various movements of your acquired Jing as it works to carry out different life processes. It converts slowly into various fluid substances as well as sexual fluids, which are slowly used up throughout your daily life. Men tend to use up their acquired Jing faster than women due to its conversion into semen, which is used up through ejaculation. According to Daoist medical teachings, this is one of the key reasons why women tend to live longer than men. As well as its conversion into fluid substances, Jing also governs the developmental processes that cause us to age and gradually decline. These are the in-built seven- and eight-year cycles of Jing movement discussed in Chapter 1.

From its base around the region of the Kidneys, your Jing travels down to the perineum area of the body where it is metaphorically referred to as 'Kidney Water' within alchemical texts. It is from this location that Jing then moves into the sexual organs and from here that it rises gradually up into the lower Dan Tien for steady conversion into Qi. This is the formation of acquired Qi from acquired Jing. This acquired form of Qi is then passed out into the rest of the body via the meridian system and the actions of the Zang Fu (臟腑) organs. The Qi carries out all the activities of the human body that enable us to function. Chinese medicine is essentially a study of

this process and its work is based upon the logic that poor health is due to stagnation of, deficiency of or excess of this form of Qi as it moves through your energetic matrix. The nature of your health dictates how smoothly this energy moves through the body and how much is used up. Poor health results in a greater dispersion of this Qi, which in turn requires that more Jing is used up to replenish these energetic reserves.

Some of the Qi that passes upwards into the middle Dan Tien is then converted into acquired Shen, which nourishes the mind and stimulates the intellect. All activities of the mind use up some of the acquired Shen, especially if that activity is very emotionally driven. All of this dispersal of Qi and Shen from the various energetic centres of your body leads to a decline of the acquired Jing, which is supplying support to the other two aspects of the San Bao. The decline in the state of your Jing then results in poorer health, a speeding up of the ageing process and various other negative aspects which Daoist arts are primarily concerned with slowing down or reversing in the foundational stages.

The above description of the movement of the acquired San Bao from its base in the Jing is a massive oversimplification of a very complex internal system, but it is enough to help us look at the practice of the '100 day virgin boy training'. This practice is a basic prerequisite to help us slow the acquired movement of the San Bao so that we have the necessary store of Jing in order to begin the alchemical 'firing process'.

The first aspect of this training is that we should stop all sexual activity of any sort. This includes not just orgasm but also sexual stimulation without reaching climax. Any sexual stimulation results in movement of the Jing as the mind is stirred, so looking at sexual imagery of any sort should be minimized as much as possible. Given the modern media obsession with using semi-clad models in advertising, it can be almost impossible to avoid completely any form of sexual imagery, but we can do our best. This abstinence from sexual activity needs to last for the entire 100 days of the preparatory phase you are working through. This applies to both men and women, although men affect their Jing to a far higher degree than women through sexual intercourse. Experience has shown me that men in particular have trouble with this aspect of the practice, and random sexual desires will often start to crop up, especially in the first two or three weeks of the training. This becomes particularly prevalent in the mornings, when it is normal to wake up with an erection, and in the middle of the night. When the Jing is building up, it becomes normal to wake around midnight

or the early hours of the morning very aroused, and this is when a lot of male students begin to fail in the 100-day process.

According to Daoist thought, the connection between the pool of Jing at the perineum and your sexual desire is absolute. Every aspect of mind has to be rooted in a physical anchor, which is generally a tissue or substance of the body. It is these physical anchors that keep the human mind rooted in the material world. These tethers are obviously severed upon death and so your spirit begins to break down into various parts and leave your body. Your sexual desire is rooted in the Jing and becomes particularly active when the acquired Jing moves into the region of the perineum, an area known as Hui Yin (會陰). This Jing then moves into the length of the penis, in the case of men, and the increase in energy here generates the reaction of an erection. Upon ejaculation the acquired Jing leaves the body through its physical manifestation of sexual fluids. This lessens the amount of acquired Jing within this region of the body and so sexual urges are temporarily sated. The same process takes place for women, although the movement of acquired Jing in this region leads to arousal and an increase in vaginal fluids.

In order to reverse this process, there is a simple practice for men which causes their erection to vanish and the acquired Jing to move back into the region of the perineum and then further back up towards the Kidneys. Upon having an erection and a feeling of sexual arousal, male practitioners should sit quietly as if beginning sitting meditation practice. With a long slow inhalation, first gently contract the muscles at the base of the penis and then, once they have raised a little, contract the muscles around the perineum until the Hui Yin meridian point lifts upwards. On the exhalation, allow both points to relax and release. These two points are shown in Figure 5.5.

Throughout this practice you should gently rest your awareness on the region of the Kidneys. You do not have to be too exact because your mind will understand where to lead the acquired Jing, providing you are roughly within the Kidney region of the lower back. Continue with this practice for a few breaths and the erection should begin to go away. After you have become used to this technique, you will find that you can feel a strong movement of warmth that travels from the shaft of the penis back into the perineum and then deep inside your body up into the Kidneys. With practice, this exercise becomes very quick and even a simple mental command will be enough to move the acquired Jing. You should become comfortable with this technique if you wish to complete the 100-day

training process successfully. This technique can also be used during meditation if an erection arises, which is a very common reaction to any movement of Jing around the perineum area.

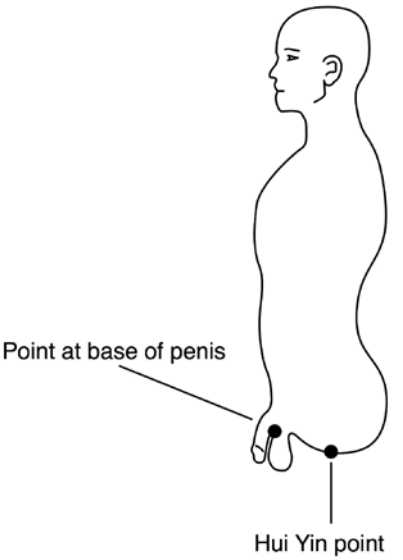


Figure 5.5: Ending an Erection

Women should not worry too much about sexual desires that arise other than to try to place their mind on another subject. There is less risk for them as the body is not moving their acquired Jing into a position where it is going to be ejected from the body.

During the period of '100 day virgin boy training' you should also seek to make the mind as still as possible. Each day should have some time set aside for working on the breathing practices outlined in Chapter 4. Really focus on allowing the mind to become as still as possible and the body to relax while you also use this time to get used to sitting and improve on your posture. Avoid watching television or movies that will stimulate strong emotional responses, especially fear or excitement, and stay away from overly fast or loud music. Through not stimulating these senses you will help to still the emotional aspect of your mind, which is a source of depletion for your Jing. Try to spend as much time away from groups of people as possible and take long walks in the countryside or do whatever other activities help you to become calm. The whole idea of this training is to make yourself as quiet and as still as possible in preparation for starting the 'firing process', and the stiller your Jing, Qi and Shen, the better.

During this time your diet should be as simple as possible. Take out all herbs and spices from your food and do not eat any meat at all. Refined sugars must go and you should try to live on simple grains and vegetables for the entire 100 days. This will help the sense of taste to relax, which will once again help your energy to become still. Do not drink any coffee and try as much as possible to drink only warm water.

As you manage to purify the senses of the body and keep your life simple, it will help your acquired San Bao to become more still. Your mind will become clearer, your emotions will stop draining your energy and your Jing can begin to consolidate, ready to be worked with through Nei Dan training. Some other benefits of this period of training that people notice are an improvement in general energy levels, a desire for fewer hours' sleep, an increase in flexibility and a strengthening of all their senses. After the first month your sexual urges become less of an issue and the last two months or so become quite simple to get through. After 100 days you will have prepared the body adequately and it is time to begin the 'firing process'.

WHAT IS THE FIRING PROCESS?

The 'firing process' is a simple breathing practice combined with a controlled use of the muscles of the lower abdomen which activates a pulse of energy at the base of the body. This then causes a reaction with the acquired Jing which begins to alter the way in which the San Bao transform within your body. It is the start of the movement from the acquired to the congenital stage of internal training.

In order to learn the technique, you need to be aware of several physical and energetic components of the body. These components are shown in Figure 5.6. They include the Ming Men meridian point, the Hui Yin meridian point, the Qi Hai (氣海) meridian point, the diaphragm and the lower Dan Tien.

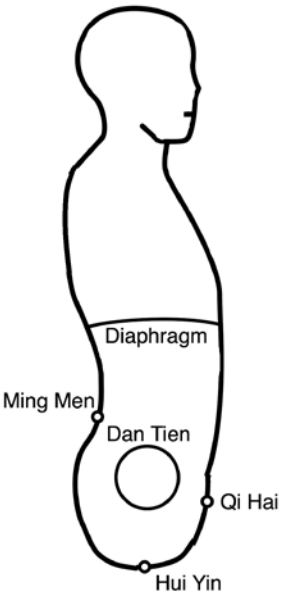


Figure 5.6: Necessary Components within the Firing Process

The 'firing process' is initiated by controlling these points in such a manner that they have a relationship with each other. This is accomplished as follows:

- First, ensure that you have carried out the 100-day preparatory training. This will prepare the acquired Jing for the start of this process.
- Sit in the most effective meditative posture that you can comfortably maintain for any period of time. Ideally, it should be a posture where you are near to the ground.
- Place your hands in the Taiji Mudra, discussed in Chapter 4.
- At first just sit and breathe in a relaxed manner for several minutes. Allow the body to relax as much as possible and get used to sitting in this way. This gives the mind space to settle a little. All alchemical training should begin with simply sitting and breathing for a few minutes as the mind and energy body always need to settle into what they are doing.
- When you are ready, drop your mind into the centre of the lower Dan Tien and rest it here for the duration of the practice. You should rest

your mind here very gently and without too much focus. It should be as though you are gently observing the actions of the lower Dan Tien rather than forcibly focusing on it. An overly strong focus can lead to stagnation, which will lead to problems developing. The first sign of this will be distension of the abdomen; if this starts to happen, then make your focus more gentle.

- When you are happy that your awareness is gently resting in the lower Dan Tien, begin to breathe by drawing in the Qi Hai meridian point as you inhale. This will mean that regular abdominal breathing is now reversed. You will be drawing in the lower abdomen upon inhalation and then relaxing the muscles back to neutral when you exhale. This should be carried out slowly and gently, with a very small amount of movement of the abdominal muscles. If the movement is too forceful, then once again you will run the risk of creating energetic stagnation. Keep in mind that the Qi within your lower abdominal region only requires a gentle push to move in the right direction. If the abdominal muscles are only drawn in very slightly, this will be enough to start your Qi within the lower abdomen moving towards the centre of the lower Dan Tien where your awareness is resting.
- Once this becomes comfortable, begin to add a slight raising of the Hui Yin meridian point on inhalation as well. This will result in your perineum lifting slightly as your abdominal muscles come in. Energetically, what is happening is that Qi Hai is coming in towards Ming Men, and Hui Yin is raising up towards the lower Dan Tien. Once again, this should be a slight movement that does not involve excessive tension or a large raising. Only a slight movement is required to stir the Jing, which should begin to rise gently up towards the lower Dan Tien where it will head towards the point where your awareness is resting.
- Remember that upon exhalation your muscles should relax and everything should return to neutral. Your mind is now still resting within the lower Dan Tien, but the muscles of your perineum and the lower abdomen are now left to their own devices.
- Continue in this manner for short bursts of around ten minutes at a time, interspaced by periods of rest for ten minutes. This technique can be quite hard work for your energy body at first so it should be

approached gently and with respect to ensure that you have time to get used to it.

This is the mechanical methodology of beginning the 'firing process'. It is designed to begin a very slight compression in the lower abdominal region below the diaphragm. This will cause the acquired Qi within the lower abdomen to move into the lower Dan Tien, along with the pool of acquired Jing at the Hui Yin region. This process is shown in Figure 5.7. This is combined with the placing of your awareness gently in the centre of the lower Dan Tien, which serves as a guide for the movement of the energetic substances as they begin to move.

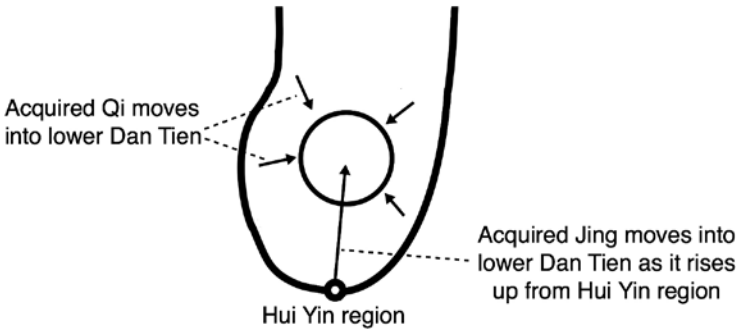

Acquired Qi moves into lower Dan Tien
Acquired Jing moves into lower Dan Tien as it rises up from Hui Yin region
Hui Yin region

Figure 5.7: Firing Process Mechanics

The straight line drawn from the Qi Hai meridian point to the Ming Men point is often known as the Ming line (命線). This is the key line of compression which should be formed in order to start the 'firing process'. It brings together the Qi Hai meridian point, which translates as 'sea of Qi', with the Ming Men point, which translates as 'doorway to Ming'. This unites the Qi and the Jing within the lower abdomen, and then we add the Hui Yin point, which translates as 'meeting point of Yin'.

Reactions to the Practice

This breathing practice should become the focus of your Nei Dan for quite some time. Sitting sessions should be for a minimum of 30 minutes but ideally for around an hour or so. This will give your body the necessary time to relax fully into the method. Once you begin this practice, you can end the '100 day virgin boy training', but you should still regulate your sexual activity and moderate your exposure to media influences that may

stir emotional responses. It is also useful to remain vegetarian until you become proficient at this method. Coming out of the 100-day preparatory phase should be done gently, much like breaking a fast. If you over-tax the system too early, you will undo all of your hard work and the Jing will be dispersed, preventing you from achieving the 'firing process' to any high degree.

The practice of breathing in this manner should continue until you begin to get the sensation of warmth in the lower abdomen. This warmth is a sign of the Jing and Qi starting to react with each other within the lower Dan Tien. At first this warmth will be quite subtle and radiate from the centre where your mind is resting, but with time it will become stronger. Continue practising until it reaches a state of being extremely clear. The heat should begin to reach the levels of feeling as though you have very warm water in your lower abdomen. As an indication of how warm it becomes, I was surprised that I was not burning myself. This warmth will grow with practice and then begin to feel as though it is swirling around inside your body. It is quite normal to reach the point where your body begins to sweat profusely. Sometimes my students get to the level where their clothes are soaked through when they achieve expertise in the 'firing process'. Even when you reach this stage, you should continue with the practice. When you stop your sitting session, this warmth will stay with you and your lower abdomen should always be warm to the touch. If you practise this process outdoors in the winter, it is possible to melt the snow around you as the warmth radiates from your body. Note, though, that outdoors training in cold weather should be attempted only by those with strong enough energy to fend off external invasions by environmental pathogenic Qi.

Metaphorically, the Daoists refer to this process as the working of the Ding (鼎) and the Lu (爐). Ding translates as the 'cauldron' and the Lu is the 'furnace'. Taken from external alchemical terminology, these are the two implements within which the conversion of base metals would have taken place. They are often depicted in alchemical texts as shown in Figure 5.8.

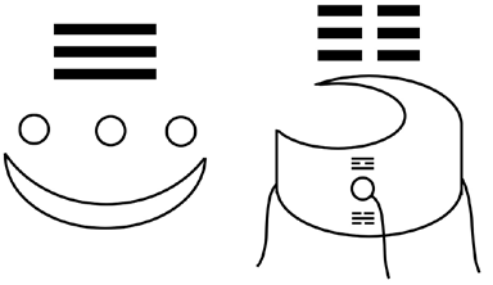


Figure 5.8: The Lu and the Ding

The Ding of the 'firing process' is the lower Dan Tien, and the Lu is the reaction of heat that you are stirring through controlled use of the muscles of the lower abdomen. Added to this is the ingredient of your awareness, and the energetic movement of your breath will also be led down to the lower Dan Tien by your awareness resting there. In Figure 5.8 the Lu is on the left and the Ding is on the right. The Lu furnace is shown as having three substances above it, which are the acquired Jing and Qi and the awareness aspect of your Shen. These are the three that must come together in order to activate the Lu in the body. It is for this reason that you must have stilled these energetic components through the 100-day preparatory training. The Ding on the right is shown as having three legs which also indicate the three alchemical agents required for the process to begin. Above the Lu and the Ding are the symbols for pure Yin and Yang, denoting which component is which during the practice. In addition, the Ding is marked with the *Yi Jing* symbols for Fire and Water, which is relevant to the next stage after achieving expertise in the 'firing process'. Figure 5.9 shows a Ding sitting in a Daoist temple in China.



Figure 5.9: A Daoist Ding

These large cauldrons are generally used for the lighting of incense and are a common feature in most Daoist temples across Asia. They should always have three legs to show the coming together of Jing, Qi and Shen; the incense lit within them signifies the rising of Shen towards connection with the Heavens.

Troubleshooting the Firing Process

I have had students who have practised the method for some time and still struggled to obtain the heat that should result from this exercise. Generally, this has been for one of four main reasons:

1. They have not completed enough work with the acquired energies. This means that they should work towards building a better foundation in Qi Gong methods, which will open up more of the energy body.
2. They are not practising often enough. Nei Dan is only really for those truly feeling a commitment to the practice; it is not for the casual student who is exploring Daoism for fun or general interest.
3. They did not carry out the 100 days' preparatory training. This is very important to the practice and must be adhered to; otherwise, there will be a glass ceiling early on in the Nei Dan process.
4. The final major reason is that they have mis-located the lower Dan Tien when attempting to rest their awareness upon it. In fact, many people completely miss the lower Dan Tien for many years when they practise Qi Gong, Nei Gong and meditation.

Double-Check the Location of the Lower Dan Tien

The lower Dan Tien can actually be quite tricky to find; it took me several years due to lack of proper guidance from teachers I had at the time. If you miss the lower Dan Tien with your awareness, then you seriously hinder the internal process in any of the Daoist arts. Many practitioners I meet have their minds too far forward or too high within the lower abdomen, so I would advise everybody to double-check their lower Dan Tien location from time to time. If you follow the following method, it is quite simple.

First, sit in a comfortable position as if you are going to begin your sitting practice. Now bring your awareness down to the perineum at the

Hui Yin meridian point. If you wish to check its location, then just raise it gently a couple of times. This will give you a muscular sensation that you can attach your mind to. Now, when you have found the perineum, this will give you the correct depth within your body: the lower Dan Tien is directly above the Hui Yin point. When I work with new people within the school who have learned Qi Gong elsewhere, they are often surprised at how far back in their body their awareness now is. It is often the case that they have been looking for the lower Dan Tien far further forward in their body. Now begin to slowly raise the mind up from this point a few inches, as if rising up a pole that runs from the crown of your head down to your perineum as shown in Figure 5.10.

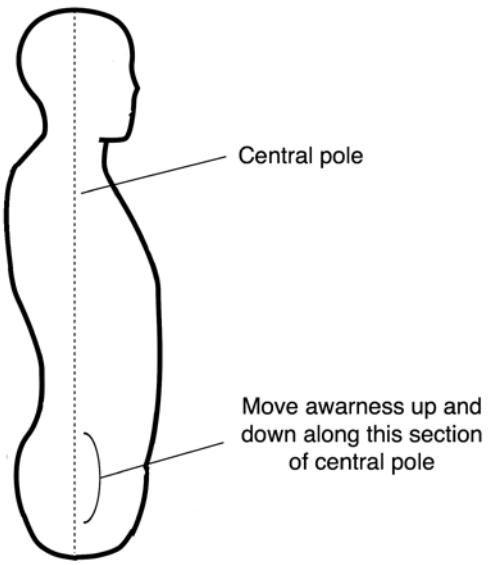


Figure 5.10: The Central Pole

Keep your mind moving slowly up and down this line to the height of your navel and back down again, always maintaining the depth so that you are directly above the Hui Yin meridian point. If you move slowly enough and stay 'listening' with your mind to what is going on inside the abdomen, you will find that at a certain height there is a strange sensation in the lower abdomen. This sensation seems to vary between a sharp point of heat for some students through to a little 'tugging' feeling on the guts as their mind moves over the spot. You need to be patient and keep at it, but with time you will find this point. When you have this, this is the centre of the lower Dan Tien. Stay with it a little so your mind has an anchor to latch on to;

then when you begin your practice, you will find that your awareness is naturally drawn to this spot. This should make the 'firing process' easier to initiate.

THE ACQUIRED ASPECT OF THE FIRING PROCESS

Figure 5.11 shows what happens to the movement of acquired Jing, Qi and Shen within your body once the 'firing process' has begun. This new cycle begins to change the workings of your energetic matrix, which in turn improves the foundation of your health.

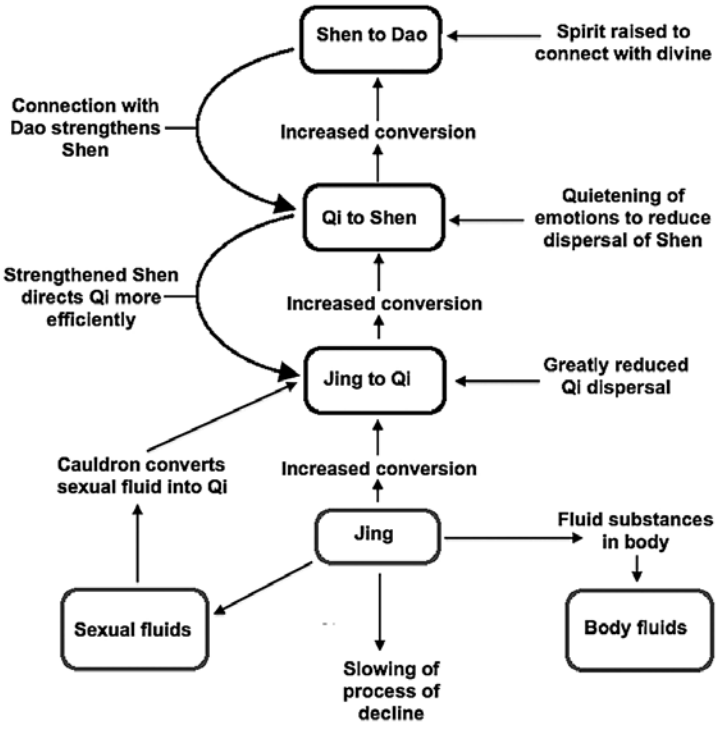


Figure 5.11: The Alchemical San Bao Cycle

The aspect of Jing that previously moved down to the perineum and transformed into sexual fluids and desires is now converted by the heat of the Lu. It moves into the Ding where it is directed upwards and converts into acquired Qi. This increases the amount of energetic flow within the meridian system and provides a boost to your energy levels. It is this change to the functioning of your internal system that decreases your need for so many hours' sleep. This also slows down the ageing process and is the

key reason so many practitioners of Nei Dan look much younger than they really are. The converted energy up into the region of the Heart is dispersed less through emotional swings and this enables your acquired mind to begin to grow quieter and more centred. This in turn enables you to focus more upon the process taking place; you will begin to see an increase in concentration levels as well as internal sensitivity. The greatest improvement to the manner in which the acquired San Bao operate is that the increased flow of Shen rising up into the upper Dan Tien region moves more into the aspect of consciousness linked with the divine rather than simply fuelling your intellect, which, in the Daoist tradition, is always seen as secondary in importance to your intuitive wisdom. Although this is still an acquired connection to the divine realm of Dao, it is enough to experience great shifts in your psychological state and even gain glimpses of connections to higher states. The truth is, however, that maintaining any more than momentary connection to higher states of consciousness relies on working directly with the congenital San Bao, which takes considerably more time and effort.

For those who wish to simply improve their health and quieten their mind, as well as attain a higher degree of concentration, this level of practice of Nei Dan is actually enough. A daily sitting session working gently on the 'firing process' will more than suffice for those wishing only to use Daoist meditative training to achieve these aims. There is no need to move on to the more complex and demanding stages of the system.

THE BUBBLING CAULDRON

The 'firing process' breathing exercise should be continued with for some time. Experience has shown me that it can generally take six months to a year of this practice daily before a person is ready to move on. There are exceptions to this timescale, of course, but in the majority of cases it will take some time before the condensing of the Jing in the region of the lower cauldron reaches a peak. Throughout all of this there should be the increase in warmth around the abdomen, which after several months' practice should result in a healthy glowing warmth that radiates out of the abdominal region of the body all year round.

It is time to move on with the practice once the warmth produced in the abdomen during sitting sessions begins to bubble. By this time it should already have started to feel like a warm fluid which swirls around in the lower abdomen, but after several months it will also start to feel as if it is

bubbling. It was when I first felt this that I understood why the metaphor of a Ding, a kind of cauldron, is used in alchemical writings. It literally feels as if your Jing is starting to bubble over like soup contained within the cauldron of your lower Dan Tien and abdomen. Note that this sensation is not subtle; it is not something you could mistake, so if it is only a faint feeling, then ignore it as this is not strong enough to indicate that you have reached this milestone. If you want a rough idea of how strong it should feel, it feels similar to being in a Jacuzzi and sitting next to one of the holes where air is coming through. The strength and movement of those bubbles is similar in feel to what starts to take place in the Dan Tien when it is time to move on with the Nei Dan process.

When you reach the stage of the bubbling starting in the lower abdomen, you will also notice that the warm 'fluid' wishes to start moving. It will want to start rising through the body in swirling waves, which can vary in intensity. This is nothing to worry about and you should simply allow this to happen. It is another sign that it is time to move on with the practice. This is when we begin to look at the practice of the 'three carts'.

THE THREE CARTS OF NEI DAN

The three carts of Nei Dan are the 'goat cart', 'the deer cart' and the 'ox cart'. These are the three animal-driven carts shown on the Xiu Zhen Tu discussed in Chapter 2. These show different breathing techniques required in order to move the bubbling contents of the lower Ding along the congenital meridians of the body. The most important of the congenital meridians are the Du and the Ren channels as these make up the 'small water wheel of Qi', an important part of both Qi Gong and Nei Dan training. After this, though, Qi also begins to move through the rest of the congenital meridians. These meridians include the Du (督脈) meridian, the Ren (任脈) meridian, the Dai (帶脈) meridian, the Chong (衝脈) meridian, the Yin Wei (陰維脈) and the Yang Wei (陽維脈) meridians, and the Yin Qiao (陰蹻脈) and Yang Qiao (陽蹻脈) meridians. These meridians form a kind of energetic cage around the rest of the meridian system and the three Dan Tien energy centres, as well as moving through the centre of the bones. Though not a complete map of the pathways of the congenital meridians, the most important branches for this stage of Nei Dan training are those channels that form the energetic cage of congenital meridians shown in Figure 5.12. This 'cage' is formed by the Du (Governing), the Ren (Conception), the Chong (Thrusting) and the Dai (Girdling) meridians.

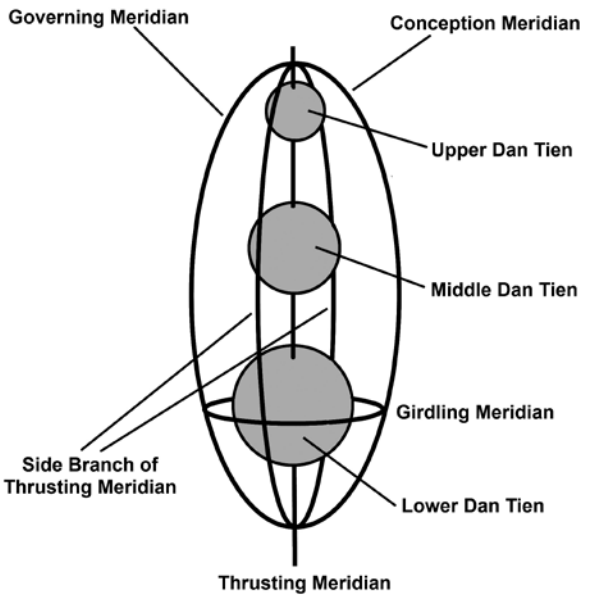


Figure 5.12: The Energetic Cage of the Congenital Meridians

These channels of energy surround the three key energy centres of the Dan Tien. These eight congenital meridians form in the human energy system early on in our fetal development and before the rest of the meridian system. They are connected deeply into the core of our energetic blueprints and as such have a close relation to our Jing, not just our Qi as with the more superficial organ meridians that are used extensively in therapies such as Shiatsu and acupuncture. With regard to your health, the congenital meridians control the state of balance of our innermost self. Long-term, chronic disharmonies are reflected here. The congenital are the storehouses for deep emotional hurts and traumatic experiences that alter the Yin and Yang balance of our constitution. It is through these meridians that the bubbling fluid of the lower Ding is circulated in order to revitalize our body's Jing. This has the effect of bringing about change on the congenital level of our health and is one of the greatest restorative techniques in Daoist alchemical training.

The first meridian that we need to move this substance along is the Du meridian. The rising of energy along this channel begins to change the congenital state of Yang within our system, and this is balanced by the next stage of descending the energetic substance through the Ren meridian, which harmonizes Yin. This will then complete one circulation through the key energetic orbit of the 'small water wheel of Qi'.

The 'small water wheel of Qi' is an important circulation of energy, which is revisited many times in your training. It can happen on different levels, and as complete an understanding as possible should be achieved on this circuit before moving too deeply into Nei Dan practice. If we look back at the Nei Jing Tu chart, we can see that the two meridians of the 'small water wheel of Qi' are shown divided into five aspects. These are shown in Figure 5.13. These five aspects are symbolized as a division of five parts as shown.

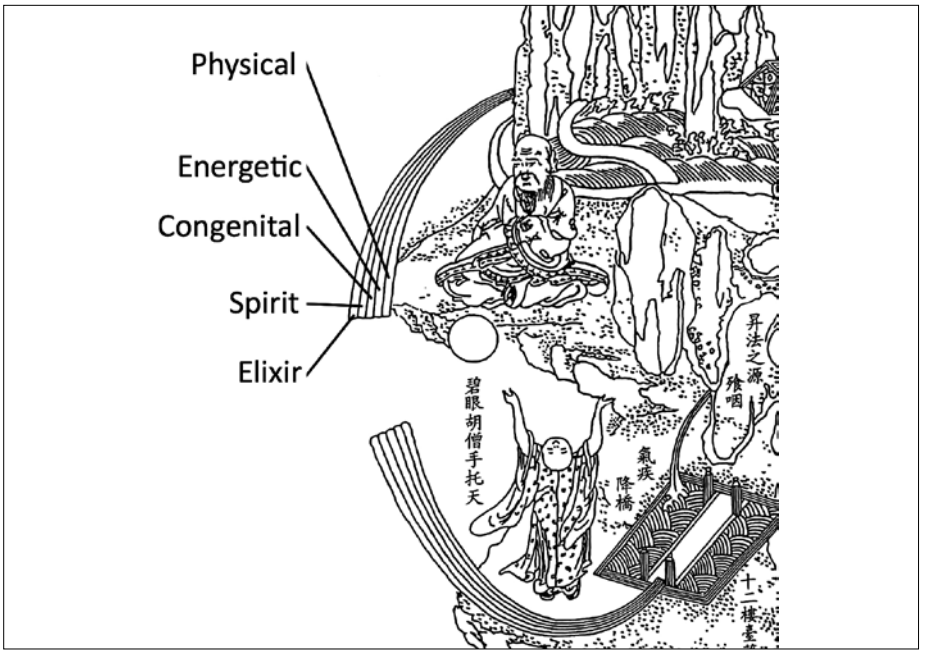


Figure 5.13: The Five Divisions of the Small Water Wheel of Qi

The 'small water wheel of Qi' is also known as the 'microcosmic orbit' or the 'wheel of law'. It invariably involves the movement of various substances along the Du and Ren meridians, forming the pathway shown in Figure 5.14. It is one of the most well-known aspects of Daoist energetic work.

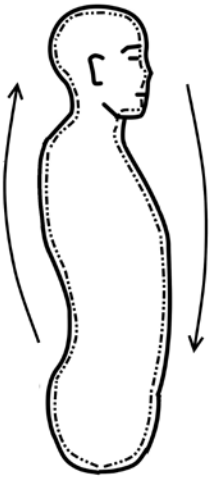


Figure 5.14: The Small Water Wheel of Qi

What is less well known is that the circulation of these two meridians can take place in different ways. There is not one single circulation of Qi to be attained but rather a developmental process for this circulation which should be moved along as you go through your practice. In brief, these five stages of development are as follows:

- Physical
- Energetic
- Congenital
- Spiritual
- Elixir

Each of these five developmental stages is discussed in brief here, but in order to avoid needless repetition I have referred to my previous books where relevant. These books contain information on other aspects of the 'small water wheel of Qi' which pertain more to Qi Gong and preparatory work rather than Nei Dan which is discussed here in detail.

The Physical Small Water Wheel

The physical aspect of the 'small water wheel of Qi' is the raising of the connective tissues along the length of the back and the sinking of tissues down the central line of the front of your body. This serves to open a circuit

along the tendon collateral or Jing Jin region of the body which serves as a 'riverbed' for your meridians. This aspect of the physical body is discussed in more detail in my previous book *The Four Dragons: Clearing the Meridians and Awakening the Spine in Nei Gong.*

The physical movement of the tissues along the 'small water wheel of Qi' is achieved through the classical principle of 'suspending the head and sinking the chest' which was discussed in the second chapter of this book. This is a body principle which is applied to almost every aspect of the internal arts. It ensures that over time the shape of your body begins to transform which, energetically, makes the movement of Qi along this line much easier to attain.

The Energetic Small Water Wheel

The next stage of the 'small water wheel of Qi' is learning how to move acquired Qi along its length. There are many different methods for achieving this which usually involve a combination of the breath and your intention. Anybody who has been involved in Qi Gong for any length of time will no doubt have encountered one of these practices at some stage in their training. This circuit is primarily to regulate the quality of the energy which flows through the 12 acquired organ meridians as well as to provide an energetic 'safety net' to prevent any problems developing in your practice. Many issues can be developed through incorrect Qi Gong practice; many of these are the result of excessive raising of the Qi up towards your head. If this happens, then various psychological problems can start to develop. One important aspect of the energetic stage of the 'small water wheel of Qi' is that it ensures that anything which raises up within your energy body then descends once more; in effect, the circulation is acting much like the earth in an electrical circuit.

The method I favour for awakening the energetic aspect of the 'small water wheel of Qi' is to gain control of the rotation of the lower Dan Tien which then drives Qi along its length. This method avoids the use of any leading of the Qi with the mind, a method that I feel has several drawbacks. For a full discussion of this technique, please refer to my previous book *Daoist Nei Gong: The Philosophical Art of Change.*

There are clear signs for achievement of this level of the 'small water wheel of Qi'. First, there should be the sensation of a strong vibration moving along the length of your spine and then falling down the front of your body. This can result in small twitches and movements within the

vertebrae in the early stages when the pathway begins to open. When the circuit is complete, the channels of flow begin to expand a little, resulting in a feeling much like air having been pumped into the circuit. Like the inner tube on a tyre, the movement of Qi here begins to open the meridians wider, which become more effective conduits for Qi energy. These and other clear signs are discussed in greater detail in my previous book mentioned above.[1]

These two stages of awakening the 'small water wheel of Qi' are the two acquired stages of development. I strongly advise that these two stages should be reached prior to working on progressing to the further three stages. The physical and energetic attainments of this circulation ensure that there are no major blockages within the channels which could create problems with further development.

The Congenital Small Water Wheel

The congenital aspect of the 'small water wheel of Qi' is the movement of the warm bubbling 'fluid' from the region of the lower Dan Tien along the length of the Du and Ren channels via the practice of the 'three carts of Nei Dan'. This is an important stage of evolution which begins to change the state of the acquired Jing. Each of the three carts revolves around a different breathing method which is combined with a gentle muscular draw to move the warmth along the Du channel. Each of the three animal carts is attached to a different section of the spine. These associations are outlined in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: The Three Cart Breathing Methods

Goat Cart	Short, fast breath with little power
Deer Cart	Longer, gentle and smooth breath
Ox Cart	Powerful deep breath with a little strength

The skill in attaining this stage of the 'small water wheel' is correctly understanding and applying these three breaths. This is the next stage in your Nei Dan practice, which we cover in detail below.

1 Mitchell, D. (2011) *Daoist Nei Gong: The Philosophical Art of Change.* London: Singing Dragon.

The Spiritual Small Water Wheel

The spiritual circulation of the 'small water wheel of Qi' is a high stage of attainment whereby the base energetic substance of unified consciousness moves as a band of silvery white light through the meridians of the congenital cage of channels. This is an indicator of the Yuan Shen beginning to suffuse into the deeper layers of your energetic being. This is a required stage to prepare the body for becoming a vessel for the alchemical agents of the 'golden elixir'. This is the stage of attainment known as the Fa Lun (法輪) or the 'wheel of law', a reference to the Yuan Shen's connection to the natural 'mandate of Heaven'.

The Elixir Aspect of the Small Water Wheel

The final stage of the 'small water wheel of Qi' is the rotation of the 'golden elixir' along the length of the Du and Ren meridians. This is one of the highest stages of attainment of this orbit, requiring the alchemical ingredients of the 'golden elixir' to have been fused together through immersion in the various alchemical cauldrons of the congenital energy body. It is a precursor to the nourishment of the 'golden embryo', discussed in Chapter 9. Not many who engage with Nei Dan ever reach this stage and few even believe that it is possible. It is a stage that requires superhuman levels of commitment and direct teaching, for I have been warned on more than one occasion that an error at this level of Nei Dan training will almost certainly result in death.

The Goat Cart

The goat cart is the first of the three carts and it is associated with the energetic branch of the Du meridian which runs over the lumbar region of the spine. It shows us the breathing method to open up the congenital aspect of the 'small water wheel of Qi' through the lumbar region of the spine. The spinal associations of all three animals are shown in Figure 5.14.



Figure 5.15: The Three Animal Carts

When the bubbling warm fluid begins to reach the stage of wanting to move upwards within the body, the practitioner should begin to lead it towards the spine. So far the lower abdomen has become something of a 'pressure cooker' for the energy within this region of the body; now we are going to use the lower spine and associated channels as a kind of valve to allow the pressure out. We do this by waiting until we feel the bubbling energy beginning to shift. From this stage we then curve the lumbar region of the spine very slightly as we inhale. This curve of the spine should be so small that you are not able to see it from the outside. Nobody watching you practise would know that any movement has taken place. The lumbar vertebrae shift very slightly as if you were about to press your lower back outwards. This is done as you draw in the Qi Hai point of the lower abdomen and raise the Hui Yin point of the perineum. This motion is shown in Figure 5.16.

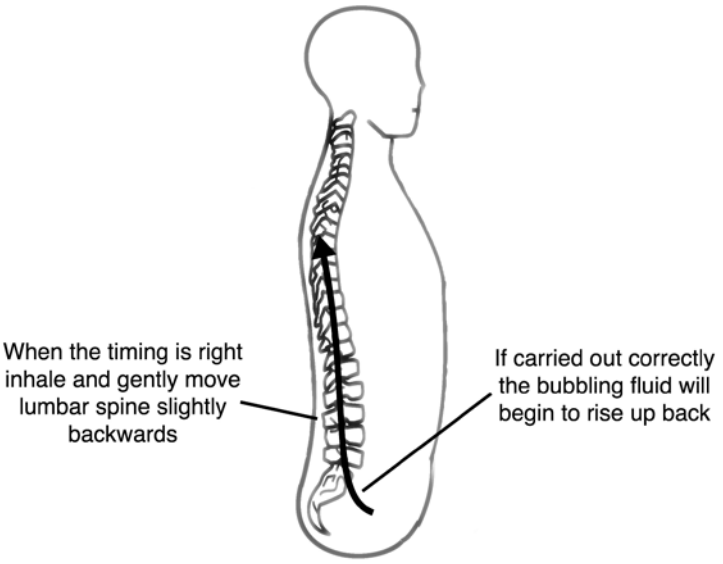


Figure 5.16: Releasing the Pressure in Lower Abdomen

What this does is begin to move the build-up point of the acquired Jing and Qi from the lower Dan Tien back to the base of the spine and around the lower back. This opens a path to give the energy access to the channel running through the spine, as well as the Du meridian which runs on top of the spine. We then add to this movement by bringing our awareness back towards the lumbar spine and then using the 'goat cart breath'. This means that our inhale wants to be short and sharp as we curve the back. The inhalation should be as if we are attempting to 'sniff' something up our nose. If you breathe in this way and combine this with drawing in the abdomen, the raising of the perineum and the slight opening of the lower spine, you will begin to lead the bubbling warm fluid from the lower Ding into the channels of your back. There will be a clear movement which is incredibly tangible as it begins to move. It will feel as though the bubbles are now moving through your spine; it is both a pleasant and an unusual sensation.

Note that only one breath in this way will be required to move the fluid up along your back. There is no need for continued breathing in this manner. Simply draw upwards once and then return to the regular method. It is quite likely that you will not succeed with this the first time you try, so when you feel it is the correct time to apply the method, you should try once and then leave it for a few minutes. Then try again, attempting to coax the bubbling sensation up your back. Keep resting and trying every few

minutes in this manner. It will begin to move when it is ready, so do not force anything by trying to 'over-will' it. If that particular sitting session is not the right time, then simply come back to it next time. Your body knows what to do; you are just helping it along a little.

When the warm bubbling fluid reaches the top of your lumbar spine, you have reached the stage of completing the 'goat cart breath'. Keep practising until you reach this stage.

The Deer Cart

The second breathing method is that of the 'deer cart', which applies to movement through the thoracic region of the back. This is a long smooth inhalation which helps to draw the energy along the long thoracic section of your back. You will find this an intuitive technique after the previous stage, so it will be quite simple. When the bubbling warmth reaches the correct area, simply repeat the inhalation method of drawing in the Qi Hai and Hui Yin meridian points. This time, though, leave the spine alone as it will not need any movement to open it up. The energy is already rising along the correct path so it will know where to go. This time, let your awareness rest in the length of the 12 thoracic vertebrae and make the inhalation long and gentle. The smoother you can make your inhalation the better. If you get it right, you will find that the warm, bubbling fluid rises in time with your inhalation right up to the base of your neck, where it will once again stop and rest. Once again, the sensation you are looking for as a sign of success is not very subtle. There are definite, clear signs of bubbles and heat moving through the length of your back.

As with the previous breathing method, you should only try once and then wait a few minutes as the correct method and the correct time for your body will mean that you can raise it in one go. Rather frustratingly, you will find in the beginning that you get the energy to rise to the top of the lumbar region and then it will often stop. Then you apply the 'deer cart' method but, instead of succeeding, the energy will drop back down into the lower abdomen and you will have to return to the previous stage. It can be a bit 'fiddly' at first to get the movement along the Du, but persevere and do not over-force anything; just be patient and work with your body to try to gain control of the method. It took me a month or so of daily practice to successfully get movement from the lower Dan Tien to the base of the neck using these methods, once the energy was ready to begin moving. However, this time will, of course, vary from person to person.

The Ox Cart

The final stage is getting the warmth to move along the length of your neck where it then enters the skull and travels over the top of your head. It is very important for this stage that you have definitely managed to open the energetic aspect of the 'small water of Qi' before progressing on to this practice. Please double-check that you are ready to move on before applying the 'ox cart breath'. If you are not ready and the energetic pathway has not been previously open, then you will get an increase in pressure inside your head as the warm, bubbling fluid gets stuck. This will result in head and eye pain, which can take weeks to fade away even after you quit this method. I made this mistake and had to step back and revisit the energetic stage of the 'small water wheel of Qi' before I could safely resume my Nei Dan training.

Once you feel you are ready, apply a strong, forceful inhalation which is much like sucking something with a lot of power. Keep the breath smooth but with a definite assertiveness to it. Think of the power of the ox compared with the fleet-footed movement of the goat or the graceful leap of the deer. This breath will then bring the warm fluid along the length of your cervical vertebrae. If there is no pressure build-up, then well done: you have reached a real milestone and managed to move the congenital fluid along the length of the Du aspect of the 'small water wheel of Qi'. The same movements of Qi Hai and Hui Yin apply to this breath and your awareness wants to rest in the neck.

Success will result in the warm bubbles flowing up through the neck and then dispersing through your head. In the poetry that accompanies the Nei Jing Tu, this is metaphorically referred to as 'the sweet spring bubbles up to the peak of the Southern mountain'. There will be a more gentle sensation of warm fluid flowing across your face and the muscles around your eyes. It is as though somebody has gently poured warm water over your head. It is a very comforting feeling which naturally 'feels right'. This has a transformative effect upon your appearance and you may at first find it difficult to understand exactly what has happened. Your eyes will appear brighter, your skin clearer, and everything will look as though it has a slight radiance to it. It is normal for those in your life to comment on this change in your general appearance.

When you reach this stage, you should stay here and stop with your current breathing practice. Just remain seated for some time and try to remain as relaxed as possible. There is no need to focus on any particular

point in the body. Just give your mind time to get used to the sensations. Only bring the movement up the Du meridian once during a single sitting session and then at first just remain seated for a while before ending the practice. It is always wise to progress slowly and always give the body time to get used to what is happening. It is normal for these stages of practice to keep you busy for some weeks until the next sign appears that it is time to move on. This is the sign of the appearance of the 'jade fluid'.

The Jade Fluid

The second aspect of the 'small water wheel' circulation is the sinking back down the front of the body. This opens up the Ren branch which connects the congenital flow back into the Ding of the lower Dan Tien and the perineum region. This branch should once again have been previously opened through movement of acquired Qi, most likely through Qi Gong or Nei Gong training. The vibrating and expanding feelings should already have been felt moving along the Ren meridian pathway before reaching this stage. If not, then step back in your training and revisit the earlier stages required to safely progress in your practice. If this has been achieved and the meridian is ready for the next stage, then you should continue with the previous training of the 'three animal carts' until the 'jade fluid' begins to appear.

The 'jade fluid' will appear as an increase in fluid in your mouth. The warm fluid rising through the Du channel will move into the head until it is ready to begin mixing with the acquired fluids which are naturally produced in your mouth all the time. What will result is a mixing of Qi, body fluids and Jing. This will take the form of a very sweet, watery fluid which fills your mouth at the point of the Du meridian fully opening. The fluid is extremely copious and very sweet-tasting; it is not easy to mistake. It is as if somebody has suddenly filled your mouth with a great deal of sugared water. This is the result of the substances coming together and mixing at the 'magpie bridge', the connecting point of the tongue, the Ren and the Du meridians. This is the element of the Nei Jing Tu shown in Figure 5.17.

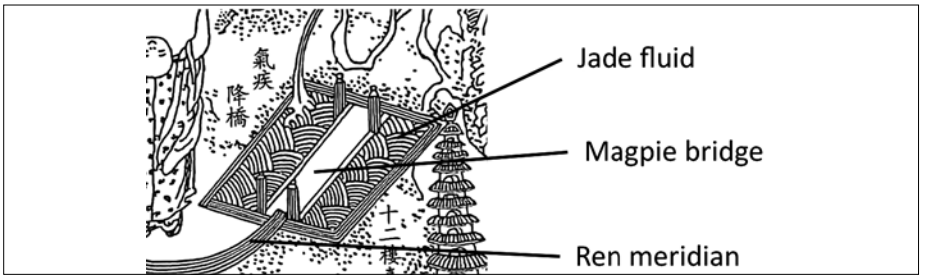


Figure 5.17: The Magpie Bridge and Jade Fluid

This fluid must then be swallowed down to the lower Dan Tien in order to complete the cycle. This has a very particular method to ensure that the essence of the 'jade fluid' is extracted ready for absorption. In Nei Dan metaphorical language, the rising of the energy along the Du is often referred to as clouds rising from the Water of the perineum. From here the clouds condense back into rain, the jade fluid, where it falls back to the Water at the base of the body once more. This 'water cycle' must be achieved and then becomes something of a constant in the rest of your Nei Dan practice.

When the fluid appears in your mouth, you should gently stretch up your head to extend your neck as shown in the image in Figure 5.18. This opens up the top of the Ren meridian which runs down the length of your neck.

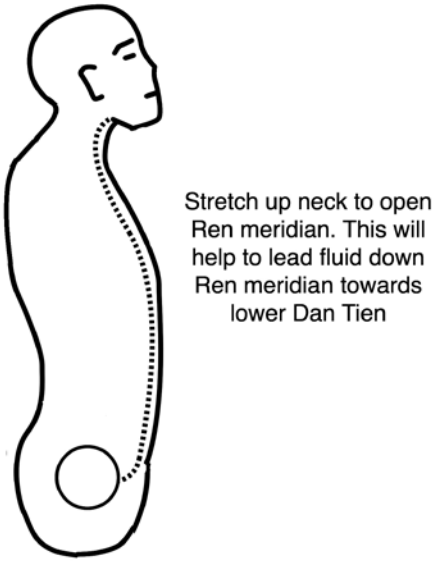


Figure 5.18: Extending the Neck and Ren Meridian

With your neck stretched like this, press your tongue with a little force against the roof of the mouth to reinforce the connection between the Ren and the Du meridians. Now swallow the fluid in your mouth while resting your awareness along the length of your Ren meridian. If you do this correctly, then, as you swallow the contents of your mouth, there will be a wave of warmth that travels the length of your Ren meridian all the way down to the lower Dan Tien. Some of my students and peers have reported that this also feels like a small electrical current, but for me personally it is just a continuation of the warmth that has risen up the length of my back. Experiences can vary from person to person, and I only share these to give you a rough idea of what to look out for.

When the movement of the 'jade fluid' reaches the lower Dan Tien, you will feel a glow of extreme heat radiating out from the lower Dan Tien which will then not only continue to bubble but also begin to shift around quite powerfully. It is as though the Dan Tien was filled with warm, bubbling fluid which begins to rotate around in its core. It is normal for the physical body to begin to follow it to some degree and sometimes quite violent twisting motions can be experienced in your torso. These are nothing to worry about and will subside on their own after the first few times you experience them. It is also quite common for there to appear to be a light glow coming from the lower abdomen when you have your eyes closed. It is as if there is a low light coming up inside your mind's eye while you sit there in your practice. Once you manage to get this circuit open through the swallowing of the 'jade fluid', the congenital aspect of the 'small water wheel' is open.

The reason that you can extract essence from the fluid within your mouth is because of the Ren meridian which runs from the throat along the front body and then via an internal branch to the Dan Tien. When you swallow, the saliva is taken into your stomach. This is the physical, manifested component of the jade fluid which is only the vessel for the essence that you are trying to extract. When you use the above method, you separate the fluid from its energetic essence which then travels directly along the Ren meridian and through into the lower Dan Tien. From here some of the essence also reaches the perineum area and it is common for this to produce a sudden sexual arousal, particularly in male students. If this happens, then simply use the method of extracting Jing from an erection discussed earlier in this chapter.

Once this cycle has been completed, you will be left with a warm, slightly bubbling sensation along the path of the Du and Ren meridians.

This is the sign that it is time to move on to the next stage of the practice, which is discussed in the next chapter.

The Clipping Passes

One last aspect of the congenital circulation of the 'small water wheel' which is important to discuss is the existence of the 'clipping passes'. These are a series of meridian points situated along the length of the Du and Ren meridians. These points are shown in Figure 5.19.

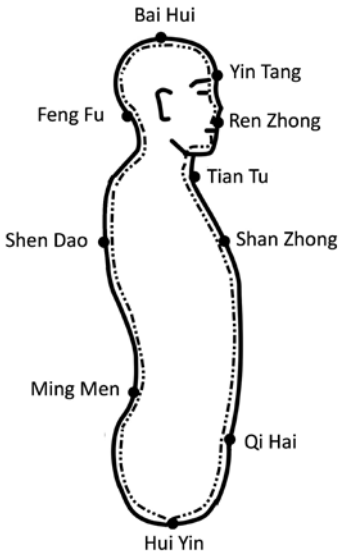


Figure 5.19: The Clipping Passes

These points include Bai Hui (百會) (Du 20), Yin Tang (印堂), Ren Zhong (人中) (Du 26), Tian Tu (天突) (Ren 22), Shan Zhong (膻中) (Ren 17), Qi Hai (氣海) (Ren 6), Hui Yin (會陰) (Ren 1), Ming Men (命門) (Du 4), Shen Dao (神道) (Du 11) and Feng Fu (風府) (Du 16). Note that the points all have alternative names within Nei Dan scripture, but I have chosen to use the common Chinese medical names for the points so that readers may find them easily within acupuncture text books.

These points are listed as common points along the 'small water wheel of Qi' where the circulation can get stuck. When you are raising the warm, bubbling sensation along the back of the body, it is likely that one or more of these points will prove tricky and that you cannot easily get past it at first. This can also happen on the front of the body. After swallowing the 'jade

fluid' down to the lower Dan Tien, you should get a smooth circulation all the way along both channels but you may get the same 'stuck' sensation on any one of the points marked along the Ren meridian as well. This is not a major problem; it just means that you need to stop focusing on the circulation at this point and spend a little time working on releasing the blockage that is getting in the way.

There are two simple ways to achieve this. The first is to use the 'Sung breathing' method to release the blockages in this region and the second is to use the expansion method discussed below. Try both methods and see which works best for you.

In order to use the expansion method, place your awareness on the point that needs releasing. Stay with this point for a few minutes and then gently expand your mind out in all directions for a few inches as if gently stretching open a sphere of awareness with the clipping pass point at its centre. Hover your mind in this sphere for anywhere up to 20 minutes and try not to let your attention move off this exercise. This process is shown in Figure 5.20.

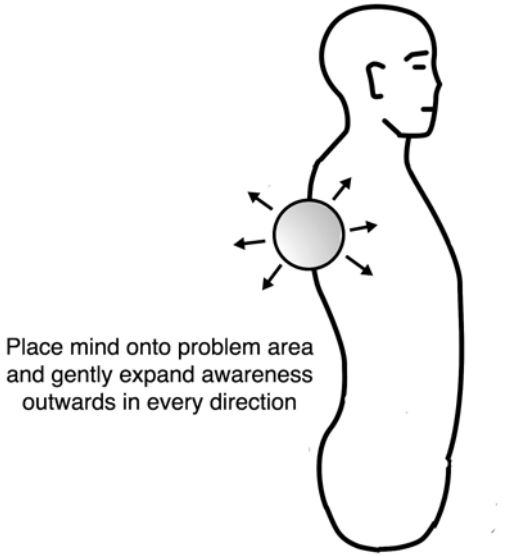


Figure 5.20: Expanding to Release

Holding your awareness out like this in a spherical manner begins to lead the Qi stuck within this region of your body to disperse. The outward movement of Qi helps to break up the blockage. As the Qi moves, it is quite normal for the muscles around this particular point to give a small spasm

or twitch. Bones in the back can even click as they move a little from the energetic release coming from between the vertebrae. You will know when the blockage has released because the warmth in your body will be able to move past this point, enabling you to carry on with your practice.

Poison Fire Tainting the Heart

A common disorder that may arise through incorrect Nei Dan training is the condition of 'poison fire tainting the Heart'. This refers to a state in which the essence of Jing is drawn upwards through the body before the early branches of the 'small water wheel' have been opened up. When this happens, there is no safety net for the returning of excess energy back down through the body into the extreme Yin region of Hui Yin (Ren 1). Instead, the energy raised upwards starts to affect the Heart, including its spiritual aspects. The common result of this is that something called the 'muddy water' or 'polluted water' rises up and touches the emotional centre sitting within the region of the practitioner's chest. The term 'muddy water' refers to the Water of the 'Kidneys' and their psycho-spiritual connection to sexual desire. As the mind grows increasingly still through your practice, the sexual desire of the Water begins to become secondary to the loving connection of the Heart's Fire. Until this stage has been reached, the rotation of the 'small water wheel' ensures that problems do not develop from the excessive rising of the 'muddy water'.

If the 'muddy water' rises too early, then the condition of 'poison fire affecting the heart' begins to manifest. This results in a large distortion of the practitioner's perception of intimacy and so sexual deviancy appears. This can result in anything ranging from slightly deviant behaviour through to violent masochistic tendencies and even paedophiliac urges. Spending so many years around the internal arts, it has often surprised me just how common deviant sexual urges are amongst high-level practitioners. Many of these may be a direct result of raising the 'muddy water' prior to adequately opening the 'small water wheel'. It is for this reason that I urge future practitioners of Nei Dan to build a really good foundation in arts such as Nei Gong and Qi Gong prior to going deep into alchemical practices.

Chapter 6

PROGRESSING ON TO FIRE AND WATER

It is an important aspect of Daoism to understand when it is right to initiate a method and when it is the correct time to simply sit back and observe what is taking place. When we observe at the correct times, this gives our energetic system a little space to carry on with whatever process is currently taking place. Where your mind goes, energy flows, meaning that if we gently observe a process that we have already initiated, then we will allow this process to become stronger without us having to use any strong intention or will power. On the other hand, simply observing and doing nothing when no process has been initiated will lead to no major results. Nei Dan is an alchemical system, a tantric method based upon control and transformation of energetic substances within the body; the art of it lies in understanding the balance of these two stages – doing and non-doing.

ZUO WANG

Zuo Wang can be translated as meaning 'sitting and forgetting'. It was one of many names given to sitting meditation within the Daoist tradition. To 'forget' means to escape from the workings of the acquired mind rather than to drop any memories. If we look at the Chinese character for Wang, 'forgetting', we can see that it includes the character for Xin 'Heart' which also implies our mind. The Heart is the seat of conscious thought within ancient Daoist thought and Wang shows the Xin being buried at the base of the character. This is shown in Figure 6.1.



Figure 6.1: The Character for Wang

So Zuo Wang can be better translated as meaning 'sitting and allowing the activities of the acquired mind to drop away'. It is the aspect of Daoist Nei Dan training where we sit back and simply observe what is taking place while placing no emphasis on initiating any major change process. We simply relax and observe what is happening in order to allow it to grow stronger. Any thoughts that arise should simply be ignored as these are activities of the acquired mind which are not beneficial to the training at this stage. Never force your mind to be quiet; simply allow it to grow still through observing but ignoring. Thoughts are powerfully creative things if we allow them to become so. The acquired mind likes to draw energy from our attention and so it gives us thought after thought in an attempt to engage our interest. As soon as we give that thought our attention for any length of time, we begin to add energy to it. Remember, where your mind goes, energy flows. Once the mind has found a thought pattern that interests us enough to deserve our attention, it stays with this thought because it has found a way to draw out energy, which then becomes a bond to another layer of the acquired mind. This layer forms another aspect of our sense of self and thus the true consciousness of the congenital mind is buried beneath another layer of distorted thought. The mind does not care whether the thoughts that draw our attention are positive or negative. Indeed, it seems to be a facet of the human condition to attach much importance to feelings of anger or sadness; slights and offences that others have caused us go around and around inside our head while we give them undue amounts of energy through fixating upon them. These then become the layers we build up. These layers then change the entire state of our perception of the world as well as the standpoint from which we experience existence. This is the process of creating the false self of the acquired mind through attachment to thought. Zuo Wang is a state of sitting practice whereby we simply ignore the random thoughts that come up inside our mind. We deny them energy for long enough until eventually the acquired mind falls

away, leaving us with a sense of inner peace which makes observation of the alchemical process taking place within us much easier.

The usefulness of entering the state of Zuo Wang will also vary depending upon the state of our energetic system, which is dictated by the level we have reached in our Nei Dan practice. Prior to the start of the 'firing process', we are working primarily with the acquired San Bao of Jing, Qi and Shen. These are the aspects of our being that govern the movement from essence into the energetic functions of the body through to the development of intellect which makes up a large part of the acquired mind. If we attempt to apply Zuo Wang at this stage, then there is the chance that we will achieve a stillness of the mind and a sense of deep inner peace but not much more than this. For many, this is enough. In the stressful modern society of acquired-mind-based media and constant stimulation, a sense of inner peace is essential. For those working through the internal processes inherent within Daoism, however, a deeper level of inner cultivation is required and the alchemical way is to shift the inner environment's workings from the acquired to the congenital. If you have successfully managed to activate the 'firing process' through your sitting practice and revolve the bubbling fluid of the lower cauldron around your 'small water wheel', then you will have begun to enter the realm of the congenital system. This is because you have reversed the movement from congenital to acquired Jing and so managed to touch upon the first of the congenital San Bao. This process is summarized in Figure 6.2. You should ensure that you understand this process before attempting any further Nei Dan exercises.

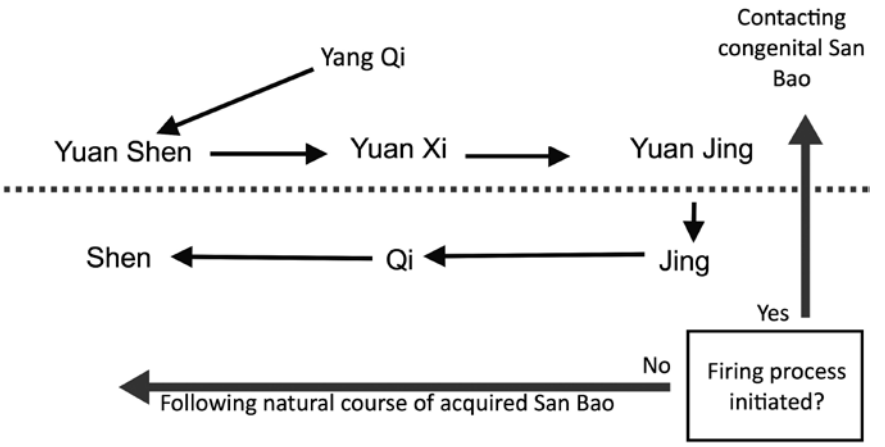


Figure 6.2: Moving from Acquired to Congenital

The rotation of the warm, bubbling fluid along the Du and the Ren meridians is a sign that you are ready to begin using Zuo Wang to enter into the congenital realms of training. This will begin to allow you to access the early stages of reversing the course of the congenital San Bao. To do this you should begin your sitting practice and continue until you reach the stage of attaining the correct circulation around the 'small water wheel'. Now relax your awareness away from any particular breathing method or mental focus. All you need to do is sit back and observe the processes taking place within the body without attempting to 'add' to any of them. This is the stage of Ting (聽), or 'listening' to what is going on inside you. As stated above, try to ignore any activities of the mind and instead just listen to your body and the processes that it may be going through at that time. You will quickly find that this is much more difficult to do than you may at first imagine. It will take you a long time of regular practice before your mind observes for a short while without running away with even the slightest thought that comes into your head. As soon as this happens and the observation is gone, the warm fluid rotating through your system will begin to fade away and you will probably have to start again. You should continue with these processes until you can successfully enter into Zuo Wang and observe the rotation for long enough, without becoming distracted, that you enter the next stage. This will most likely mean that you need to reach the stage of being able to sit in Zuo Wang, free from attachments to acquired thought, for a good 20–30 minutes after successfully achieving the 'firing process'. Be prepared to persevere with this method daily for between several months and a couple of years in order to manage this successfully. You should be realistic with your timescales for this kind of training and accept that Nei Dan is one of the most difficult aspects of Daoism.

THE WHITE MIST

You will know when you have successfully remained within the state of Zuo Wang for an adequate time because a phenomenon called the 'white mist' will appear. This is also known as the 'white room' or, rather poetically, 'clouds over the mountain'. This is a sign of the five aspects of Shen attempting to come together into a single unit as they did prior to your birth. The full convergence of the five spirits is a long task with several different stages, but this early stage shows that you have touched upon the congenital and successfully provided the correct circumstances for this to

begin happening. The 'white mist' takes the form of a white hazy cloud that appears in front of your vision while you are sitting with your eyes closed. It forms in front of you and then begins to thicken until it becomes like clouds on an overcast day. After some time in this state the 'mist' then begins to glow white as if the sun is shining through the clouds. I have tried to represent the three stages of the formation of the 'white mist' in Figure 6.3, although, of course, each person's experience will vary to some degree.

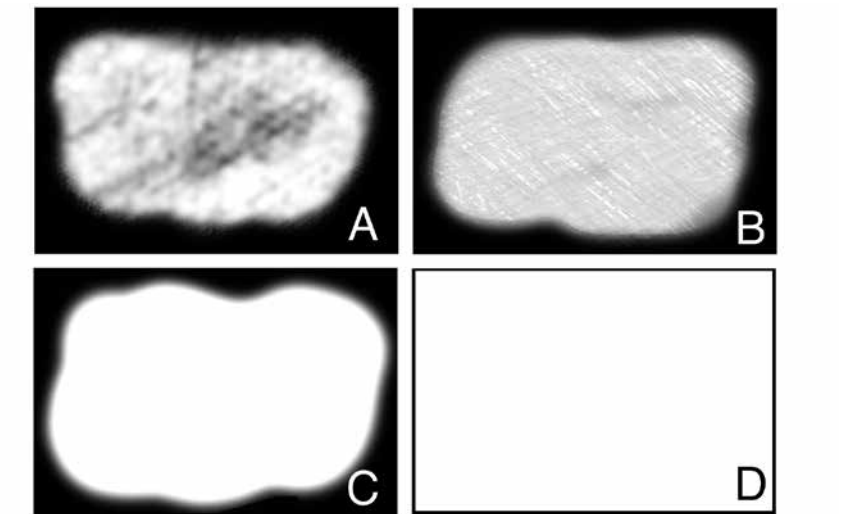


Figure 6.3: The White Mist Forming

I and some of my peers experienced the 'white mist' forming as in image A – a faint dull white hue which appears in the mind's eye. It is semi-transparent and looks like a fine mist. From here it condenses into image B so that it looks like a grey cloud on an overcast day. Image C shows the next stage where the white cloud begins to glow brightly as if the sun is shining from behind it. From here it moves into image D, whereby the white glow floods your vision. At this stage the white light is all around you, no matter if you turn your head or not. Curiously, if you open your eyes at this stage, it is also normal for the world around you to look radiant, as if it has a slight glow, although this only seems to last for a few minutes at a time. It is quite normal to go through these four developmental stages of the 'white mist' during one sitting session as the metamorphosis from faint white mist through to bright white light can take around ten minutes, providing you can stay in Zuo Wang; if you are distracted into activities of the acquired

mind, the white light vanishes, often along with the heat produced from the 'firing process'.

The 'white mist' is a sign of the five acquired spirits attempting to merge with each other and so you are witnessing a heightened level of connection between them. The result of this is that the light of true congenital consciousness shines through the darkness of the acquired mind. While this is happening, layers of the acquired mind will begin to shed as their energetic bond is severed, and changes, some subtle and some not so subtle, will begin to take place within your Xing.

Anchoring the White Mist

The white light which appears from the 'mist' is known as the Shen Ming (神明), the 'illuminated spirit'. We can use this light as a tool for further development. This is because everything in the cosmos must have an energetic and spiritual component to it. This energetic 'substance' is what we are trying to work with through alchemical practice. As human beings, we have our physical manifestation as well as our energetic system and then a spiritual or consciousness body. These three exist at the same time, overlaid on to each other, with the more dense physical body being the anchor that tethers the energy and consciousness body into our world. This is shown in Figure 6.4.

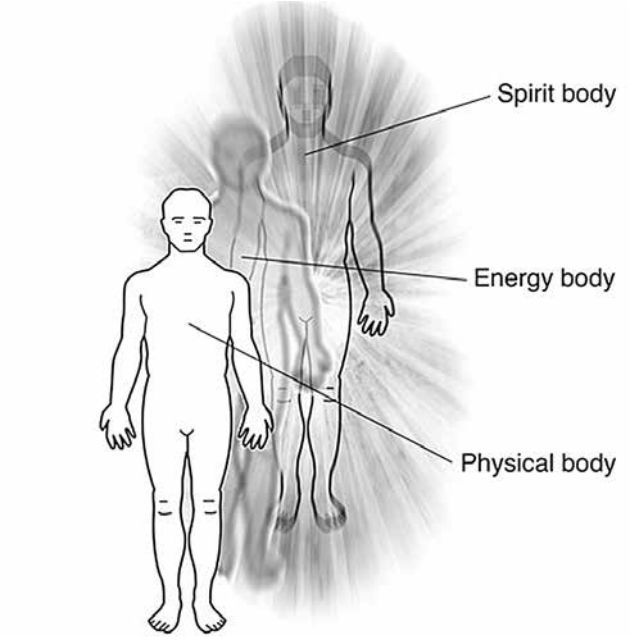


Figure 6.4: The Tethering of the Three Bodies

Our thoughts, emotions and mindsets are also the same. For every aspect of mind and consciousness there is also an energetic component/overlay which is what we are trying to work with. Meditation systems based solely upon accessing the mind will try to change our emotions and thought patterns directly, whereas alchemical methods search for the energetic 'substance' behind these aspects of mind and work with them instead. The energetic 'substance' for the coming together of the five spirits is the Shen Ming, and so we now need to access it and move it within the body so that we can alchemically combine it with other 'substances'. This is the basic premise of intermediate- to high-level Nei Dan training.

Men need to now anchor this white light within their lower Dan Tien, whereas women anchor it within the middle Dan Tien. This then begins a purification process of the most transient aspects of acquired mind for both genders. A more detailed discussion of the differences between men and women is given in Chapter 7, together with a full description of women's Nei Dan training, so we will not discuss it here. Instead, there is now a description of the methodology.

When Shen Ming appears, you should leave the Zuo Wang state by directing your mind down into the correct Dan Tien. Your focus should shift away from observing what is taking place within your body and instead drop as close as possible to the core of your Dan Tien – lower for men and middle for women. This will help to purify the aspects of mind linked to the element of Water for men and the element of Fire for women. In men this will begin to change their base desires, whereas for women it will begin to consolidate their emotional self. It also ensures that a major storehouse for Jing in both sexes begins to transmute in the correct manner. See Chapter 7 for details on variations in the location of Jing for female practitioners of Nei Dan.

Men should ensure that they have successfully located the lower Dan Tien by cross-referencing the Hui Yin and Qi Hai points as discussed in Chapter 5. This should be easier to do now as there should also be a strong bubbling sensation of heat within the lower Dan Tien. Male practitioners should then drop their mind down into the lower Dan Tien and keep it resting there. This will then cause the 'white mist' or the 'white light', depending upon your stage, to move downwards into your lower Dan Tien. As a result, the lower Dan Tien will begin to glow with this white light and the space in front at the height of your eyes will clear once again. In your mind's eye it will now seem as if you are sitting in darkness with a faint white glow coming from the lower Dan Tien. As soon as all of the white

light has moved down into the lower Dan Tien, you should return to Zuo Wang and no longer focus on this area. Instead, just wait and observe what is taking place once more to allow the body to grow used to this process. Any time Shen Ming grows in front of you at the height of the eyes again, repeat the same process to anchor it into the lower Dan Tien.

Women do not need to be as exact with the location of the middle Dan Tien as men need to be with the lower. They should bring their mind gently to the height of the heart in the centre of the chest and rest it here. They will find that very quickly the white light moves down into the chest region. This light should then glow out from the region of the Heart and begin to change to a pale yellow colour, though some women say that it remains white for them. Individual experience will vary from person to person. As with men, as soon as this process has finished and the light has moved, you should return to Zuo Wang and observe what is taking place in order to help the body grow used to this process. Figure 6.5 summarizes this process.

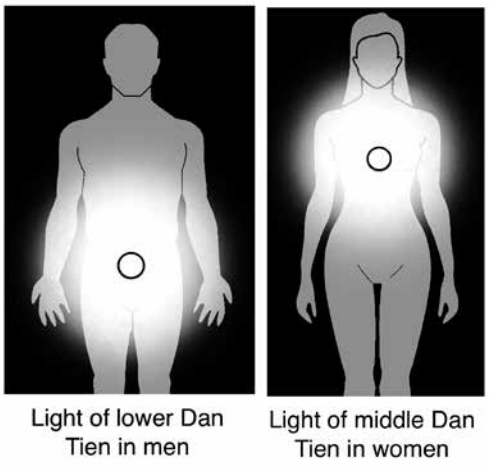


Figure 6.5: The Movement of Shen Ming in Men and Women

On the whole, women should find this process much easier and quicker to achieve than men due to having an innate sensitivity, something that men must cultivate through their practice. Certainly some of the women I have taught have achieved this level much quicker than I ever did.

Flashes of Shen Ming

A common experience reported to me by many of my students is of having brief flashes of these lights appearing while they are in Nei Dan practice. When they enter into Zuo Wang, they have a long period of trying to ignore their mind and then suddenly they have a brief experience of the light or mist which is then gone again. It is too brief a flash to focus on leading it anywhere and they then struggle to get the experience to last. In fact, the more they struggle, the less likely they are to manage to stabilize the light for any length of time. If you experience this same issue, then treat it as a positive sign. A large part of internal training is learning how to 'tune in' to the various vibrational states of the energetic and consciousness realms. This is largely the role of the brain, which is like an organic radio. At first it is only tuned into the physical realm, but with time it will learn how to refine its awareness and give you access to feeling in the energetic and spiritual realms as well. It is just a matter of being patient, persevering with the practice and giving your body time to adjust to a new and unfamiliar realm of awareness. The reason I say that a brief experience such as this is a positive sign is that it shows you are able to tune in to it, even if not for long. Once that frequency becomes a possibility for your brain to contact, it is just a matter of time before it fully understands where it is supposed to go and then your experiences will become longer and more stable. Increasing awareness of higher vibrational realms goes pretty much hand in hand with learning to quieten your mental chatter through Zuo Wang. Thoughts and mental activity of the acquired mind lower your frequency of awareness and this is what needs to change.

Another important aspect to make clear at this point is that the various lights and sensations that appear at different stages of Nei Dan training should never be encouraged or imagined. At no point in alchemical training do we ever imagine a white light or any other light or image. Imagination is a facet of the acquired mind which is utilized within many systems of meditation but not Daoist alchemy. The experiences you have should be as a direct result of the circumstances you have set up during your practice. They should arise for you but never be 'created' by the mind. In many cases, the visualizations you are encouraged to imagine are based upon real experiences practitioners have had and reported in the past. The real experiences that you should have from your training are far more profound than any imagined image.

THE SCHOLAR AND THE MARTIAL FIRE

Two words that come up within alchemical circles in Asia are Wen Huo (文火) and Wu Huo (武火). These can be translated as meaning the 'scholar fire' and the 'martial fire'. Important as they are, I rarely see them being written about or discussed in the West. It is the balance of the scholar fire and the martial fire that helps us to move on to the important stage of 'mixing Kan and Li'.

The scholar fire is the controlled manipulation of the breath and perineum which you have already used to start the 'firing process'. It is so called because, like a scholar, you are engaging your intellectual mind to control your breath, intention and body movements to 'light the furnace' below the cauldron of the lower Dan Tien. It is a controlled method resulting in the bubbling of the congenital fluid which rotates around the body. This should have taken you to the stage of attainment of a glowing warmth throughout the body, a feeling of bubbling warmth within the lower Dan Tien and the warmth around the circulation of the Du and Ren meridians.

The martial fire is quite different: it is an uncontrolled and somewhat forceful breath that is beyond your conscious control. Like a wild fighter, the martial fire burns brightly for a short period, stimulating higher degrees of warmth and stronger reactions within the body. Progression to the next stage of Nei Dan training requires accessing the two types of fire and understanding their uses and relationship.

It is interesting to note that although Nei Dan practice tends to be laid out in a systematic, step-by-step manner within scripture and books, it rarely works out like this. Any process that a teacher can formulate will only ever be, at most, around 80 per cent accurate because human nature is complex. Individual practitioners will jump around the stages to some degree and not follow the set order. This will be an *automatic* jumping around of stages, though, and should not be something you choose to do consciously. I have known people who started to try to 'light the fire' but ended up experiencing the 'white mist' instead, or who have even tried to practise basic Qi Gong but ended up generating masses of heat in the 'small water wheel of Qi' – a stage generally expected to start through Nei Dan practice. In each of these cases, although higher stages have been experienced, there always seems to be a 'glass ceiling' effect upon their development, which stops them progressing until they have returned to the previous stages and built a solid enough foundation.

The stages of the 'white mist' and the 'scholar and martial fire' are two stages of development in Nei Dan that are actually quite difficult to put into any order as they are quite interchangeable. Classically, the 'white mist' was said to come first, but that rarely seems to be the case. If I had to lay it out from my own experience, I would say that there are actually two parallel branches of development that can take place at the same time. The bringing down of the white light into the lower or middle Dan Tien helps to purify either Fire or Water in the practitioner, depending on their gender, and then the two fire types help to stimulate Fire and Water to action. This begins the next stage of working with Kan and Li. I have laid this out in Figure 6.6 for reference.

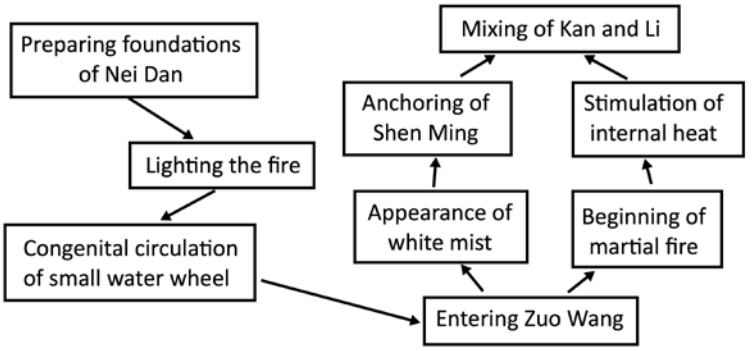

Preparing foundations of Nei Dan
Lighting the fire
Congenital circulation of small water wheel
Entering Zuo Wang
Appearance of white mist
Beginning of martial fire
Anchoring of Shen Ming
Stimulation of internal heat
Mixing of Kan and Li

Figure 6.6: The Alchemical Stages

I suspect that after entering Zuo Wang you will actually begin to experience both of the next stages at the same time. Sometimes the light will appear in front of your eyes and at other times the martial fire will begin. Either is fine; just stay with it and work on the correct procedures for each stage.

The Martial Fire

The scholar fire serves to initiate the 'firing process' and generate the bubbling warmth that sits within the lower cauldron. The martial fire is used to raise the warmth out of the lower cauldron where it can begin to generate reactions throughout the rest of the energetic system. It also begins to raise Water upwards, as explained below. The difference between the two fires is shown in Figure 6.7.

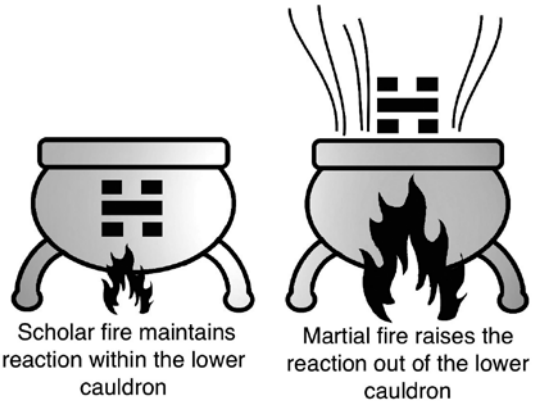


Figure 6.7: The Martial and Scholar Fire and the Lower Cauldron

It is very important to understand that the martial fire should start on its own. It should be an automatic bodily response to the lower cauldron becoming 'full' of congenital fluid. In some cases, we may try to stimulate it to action by focusing on a particular meridian point, but that is all. We do not have to force it to happen. I see this misunderstood time and time again and it really will prevent any progress if the martial fire does not start of its own accord.

The martial fire is a rapid version of the breathing method utilized to awaken the 'firing process'. When we breathe martially, we follow the same process of raising the perineum or Hui Yin point on our inhalation at the same time as drawing in the lower abdomen or Qi Hai point. The only difference is that our breathing becomes short and rapid with fast exhalations as the breath is pushed out of our lungs. When full martial breathing begins, it is normal to breathe at a rate of around six breaths a second. This has a lot of similarities to Yogic bellows breathing with regard to its appearance, although its inner mechanics are quite different.

If you try to create the martial breath physically, then the wrong muscles will be used and you will just cause the warmth in your lower abdomen to disperse. When it begins of its own accord, you will find that the heat around the area of your perineum and lower Dan Tien becomes incredibly strong, like a fire blazing. This is the full martial fire. Physically produced breathing of this kind is also very loud as the air being forced out of the nostrils sounds quite violent. This is because if you create this breathing externally, you will be using your diaphragm quite strongly, which pushes the air out on exhalation; also, the movement of the diaphragm releases the pressure in the lower abdomen, which disperses the warmth you have been cultivating.

Internally produced martial breathing should begin on its own as a reaction to the cultivation of the contents of the lower cauldron. This version of the breathing is rapid and yet quite silent. The air is not pushed forcefully out of the nostrils as the diaphragm is hardly involved. Instead, the line of energy running between your Ming Men and Qi Hai points is actually beginning to pulse, which serves to contract and then release the two points at great speed. The diaphragm hardly moves at all when this happens, and you feel as though only your lower abdomen is breathing. This line is shown in Figure 6.8.

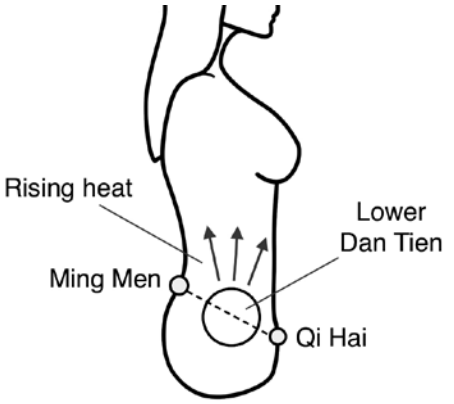


Figure 6.8: The Internal Line of the Warrior Breath

The rise in internal heat is quite strong; you will not miss it as it is not a subtle sensation. When your breathing automatically switches and the martial fire begins to burn, the congenital fluid within the lower cauldron begins to move through the rest of your meridian system. It follows different routes through the body as it travels through the various channels and orbits of the energetic body. This is a very pleasant feeling as the whole of your body ends up awash with warm, bubbling fluid. This has a strongly relaxing and rejuvenating effect on the body. Chronic injuries and old diseases can begin to fade as the nature of your Jing is basically 'reset' to varying degrees, depending upon the quality of the congenital fluid you have been cultivating in the lower cauldron.

Some schools of Nei Dan emphasize counting martial breaths, with the focus on different numbers. These numbers are said to have powerful alchemical reasoning behind them, but I find that counting the breaths engages my acquired mind so I do not fixate upon exact amounts. The only real guidance I try to adhere to is that too much martial fire can begin to

'scorch' the body; this runs the risk of putting the energy body into an excessive state of being. For this reason I follow the classical guidance of no more than 36 breaths using martial breathing. I translate this into six seconds (6 x 6 breaths per second), meaning that I only allow my body to automatically slip into martial breathing for approximately six seconds at a time. No matter whether my body wants to or not, I take control and switch back to scholar breathing after around six seconds and then wait a few minutes before I give my body mental permission to return to martial breathing if it is ready to. Sometimes it then drops straight back into another six seconds of martial breathing and sometimes it does not. I never force the body into it. These short bursts of martial fire stimulate the congenital fluid more than adequately. It rises out of the lower cauldron and circulates through the system enough to bathe my entire body in warmth.

As with practice of the 'firing process', you will start to produce the 'jade fluid' in your mouth, which should be swallowed in the same way as described in Chapter 5. The essence of the fluid should be extracted down into the lower cauldron as before, which will nourish the congenital fluid and improve its quality.

The martial fire will begin when you enter into the Zuo Wang state and only when enough congenital fluid has been produced in the lower Dan Tien. It will require full circulation of congenital fluid within the 'small water wheel'. This is why the stages of 'martial fire' and 'white mist' are not, strictly speaking, to be experienced one after the other. Either can start when the practitioner enters Zuo Wang and has practised long enough to adequately silence the mental chatter of the acquired mind.

The martial breathing will continue for quite some time – usually several months to a year or so of daily practice – before the next stage of 'mixing Kan and Li' begins.

MIXING KAN AND LI

The 'mixing of Kan and Li' can refer to different aspects of Daoist internal training, depending on the developmental stage you have reached and the specific practice you are engaging in. The first level of 'mixing Kan and Li' refers to simply placing your mind within the centre of the lower Dan Tien. The second level is controlling the location of your body's centre of gravity so that it generates a reaction between the auric fields of the lower and middle Dan Tien. The third level of 'mixing Kan and Li' pertains to alchemy and is the only real definition of the term relevant to the practices contained

in this book. This is the stage of causing a release in the acquired mind so that a reaction within the consciousness can take place. This process is vital to alchemical development and yet causes much confusion in practitioners due to the metaphorical language it tends to be hidden behind. Terms such as 'mixing Kan and Li', 'immersion of Fire in Water', 'Dragon and Tiger copulating', 'extraction of mercury from cinnabar', 'extraction of true lead from Water', 'the hare in the moon' and 'raven in the sun' were used in ancient times to hide the Nei Dan process. In order to understand Nei Dan conversion processes, it is necessary that we gain an understanding of these terms and see beyond the metaphorical language to what is actually taking place within the realm of our inner environment.

What are Kan and Li?

Kan and Li are two trigrammatic symbols from the *Yi Jing*. They are generally given the names of Water and Fire. They are the two symbols shown in Figure 6.9.

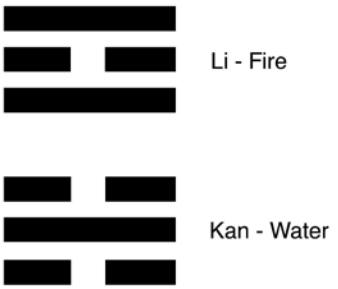


Figure 6.9: Kan and Li

In *Yi Jing* symbolism, a solid line indicates Yang and a broken line indicates Yin. Each of the symbols used by the *Yi Jing* shows a composite mix of Yin and Yang energies combined into either two-, three- or six-line symbols. Each of these symbols represents a form of energy or information that is moving through the cosmos. These then give a conceptual framework with which to understand the shifting energetics flowing through and behind the realm of existence. The symbols of the *Yi Jing* are used extensively in Nei Dan theory and in their scripture and charts; to the initiated, a single symbol can carry a great deal of information which would be difficult to put into words. When trying to understand the processes inherent within Nei Dan, you usually approach the teachings and seek verbal instruction;

from here you then add to your information, seeking through the study of written word. Once you reach a high enough level, the written word fades away and instead you can rely on the symbols of the *Yi Jing*. Their hidden meanings become clear and they open up to you another level of instruction with which true consciousness resonates to a high degree. For the beginner, though, they can seem almost incomprehensible!

There are two key circular arrangements for the eight basic symbols or Gua of the *Yi Jing*. These two arrangements represent the congenital state of things and the acquired. They especially apply to Nei Dan practice as they are considered to show the state of a Zhen Ren's Xing and that of a regular person. These are the two arrangements shown in Figure 6.10. The left-hand symbol is the congenital arrangement and the right-hand symbol is the acquired.

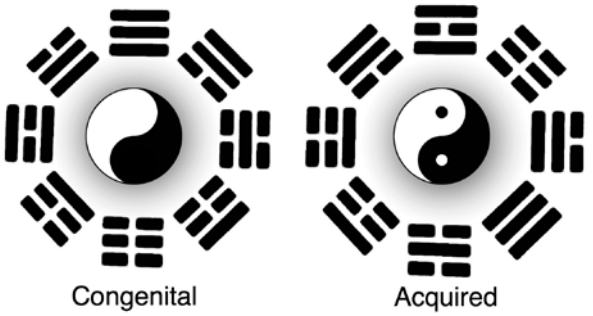


Figure 6.10: Congenital and Acquired Ba Gua

The congenital arrangement has the symbols for Heaven and Earth, Qian and Kun, on the top and bottom, showing that these are the two key poles between which everything is organized. The acquired arrangement has Fire and Water at the top and bottom, showing that pure Yin and Yang have become sullied. Transient nature has stepped in and stillness has faded into the background. Movement exists when there is a change from Yin to Yang or vice versa; all life and developmental processes rely on this cyclical movement between these two states as well as the gradient of shift that exists between the two. Kan and Li represent the states of Yin and Yang when in a state of movement and change, which is shown by the fact that they are formed from either two Yin lines and one Yang or two Yang lines and one Yin.

Each section of the human energetic system can be classified according to the symbols of the *Yi Jing*. The most important areas for Nei Dan

practitioners are the regions of the lower abdomen and the Heart, which are associated with Kan and Li, as shown in Figure 6.11. These areas also strongly correspond to the middle and lower Dan Tien.

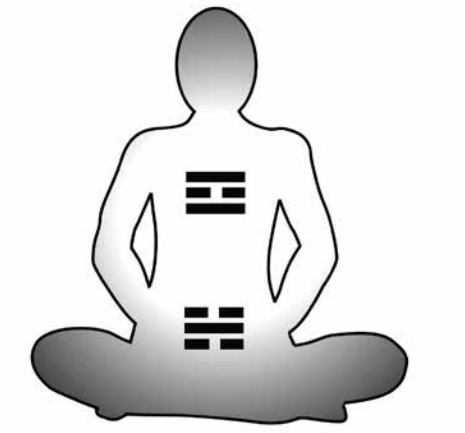


Figure 6.11: Kan and Li in the Body

Kan is the Water element which is connected to the Kidneys, the acquired Jing, sexual drive, base desires and the lower Dan Tien. It is the energetic imprint of the Water elemental energy which you have been 'cooking' in the lower cauldron up to this point. Kan and the Water element are primarily Yin in nature, which is shown by the two Yin lines to one Yang line. This shows that the natural state for the Kan symbol is stillness, though at its core it has the potential for Yang – movement. It is through the practice so far that you have been working on getting the balance between these two aspects of Kan right.

The stillness of Kan has been created through the waking up of the Ding and the Lu through the 'firing process'. The generation of the warmth around the perineum and the circulation of the congenital fluid through the 'small water wheel' have changed the manner in which the acquired Jing functions when it reaches the base of your body. This is shown in the two charts from Figure 6.12. Image A shows the movement of acquired Jing prior to starting the 'firing process' and image B shows the movement of acquired Jing after starting the 'firing process'.

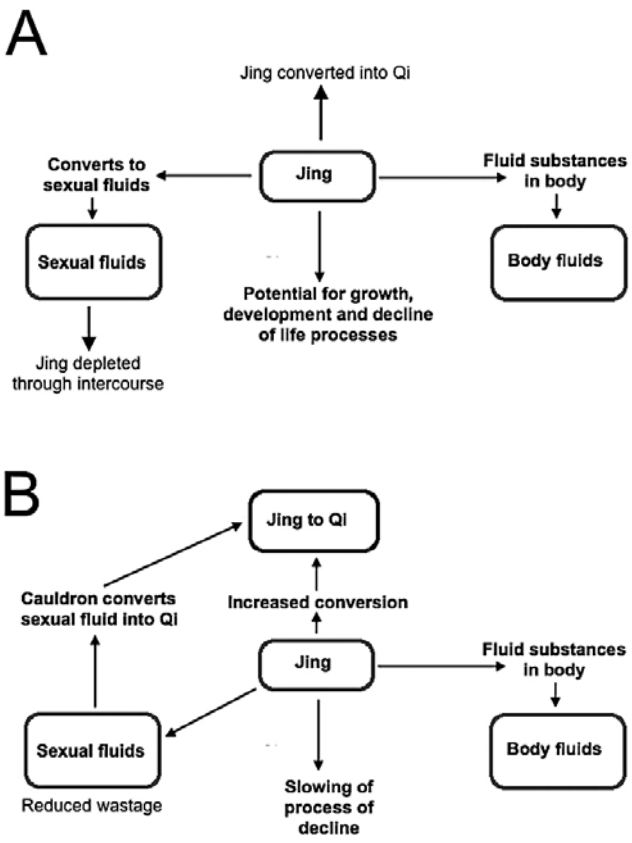


Figure 6.12: Acquired Jing during Firing Process

It is the movement of the acquired Jing that moves us through the ageing process and generates our sexual fluids. The movement of sexual fluids then generates sexual desire, which dictates a great deal of our acquired thought patterns and motivations. Once the 'firing process' has been achieved, this acquired Jing moves in a different manner and much of it is 'recycled' upwards into the rest of the energetic system. This slows the ageing process and reduces our sexual drive as well as our governance by base desires. This is the manifestation of the movement towards a greater level of stillness for the Kan symbol. The further we return our acquired Jing towards congenital Jing, the closer we move towards stillness of Kan. This process is also sometimes known in alchemical scripture as 'purifying the sullied Water'.

The movement of Kan is generated by the arising of the 'martial fire'. As our breathing switches into the stimulating state discussed above, we generate a rising of heat through the body. This is helped by the movement

of energy along the Du meridian by the Ming Huo (命火), the expanding ball of Qi which generates the driving function of Kidney Yang. It is this movement, combined with the stillness created by the activation of the 'firing process', that completes the setting up of Kan within the lower abdomen.

Li is the symbol of Fire. It is a Yang symbol as shown by its two Yang lines and only one central Yin line. It is the energy of the Heart, the middle Dan Tien, our emotional self and our connection to others both socially and romantically. The two Yang lines of Li show that it is subject to large degrees of movement. This movement is largely down to our emotional swings and the movements of the mind. Emotional energy can be thought of as the glue that binds the layers of our acquired mind over and around our true nature. Every experience we have has some kind of emotional content contained within it which is generated by the movement of information in our Heart centre as we process those experiences. Despite this constant state of movement taking place within this region of our body, we do have the potential for profound stillness, represented by the broken Yin line at the centre of Li.

The gradual draining of energy through extreme emotional states is a large concern for practitioners of Nei Dan. Emotional disturbances lead to a condition known as 'Fire draining Water' in alchemical texts, which is summarized in Figure 6.13.

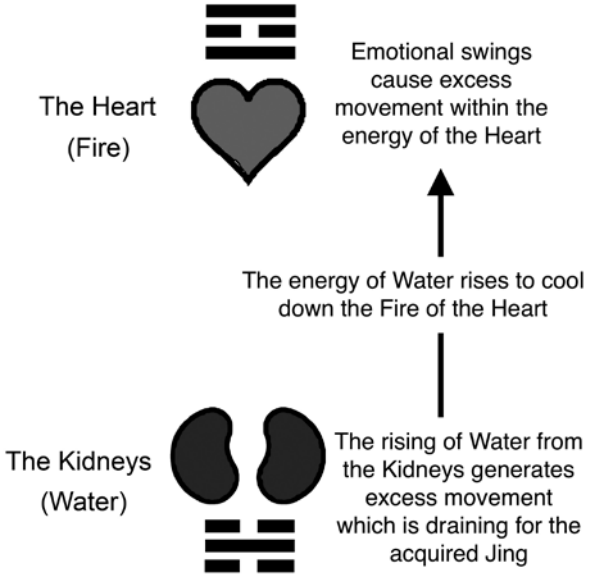

The Heart
(Fire)
Emotional swings cause excess movement within the energy of the Heart
The energy of Water rises to cool down the Fire of the Heart
The Kidneys
(Water)
The rising of Water from the Kidneys generates excess movement which is draining for the acquired Jing

Figure 6.13: Fire Draining Water

As emotional extremes cause the movement of energy around the region of the Heart, there is an expansion of the Qi here which leads to energetic heat being generated. In Chinese medicine this is one of the great internal pathogens which must be cleared when treating a patient. In order to prevent the heat generated around the Heart from being damaging, the Kidneys produce a form of Qi that rises up to 'cool' the Heart. This generates movement within the region of the Kidneys and overly stimulates the Kan energy which moves it away from a suitable state for Nei Dan practice. This depletion of Yin to cool Yang is a major hurdle for alchemical practice and is why those wishing to move deep into their practice often retreated from society into the quiet of the mountains for periods of time. Progressing to further stages of Nei Dan really requires being removed from any stressful or difficult situations in your life. A person in an emotionally difficult situation will find it almost impossible to progress to the level of 'mixing Kan and Li'.

When we still the Heart's energy through entering Zuo Wang effectively, we return the Li symbol's energy to the correct state for progress in Nei Dan. The stillness produced from allowing the movements of acquired mind to settle enables the Li trigram to settle and then it is ready for the process of 'mixing' with Kan.

The Process of Mixing

In order for Kan and Li to mix, you must have attained the level discussed above of settling Kan and Li into efficient states ready for meeting each other. The 'martial fire' must then be achieved and congenital fluid should be moving through the system. It is only at this level that the energies of Kan and Li begin to move and interact with each other. When this happens, there is a strong movement of acquired Yin and Yang towards each other. Both energies pull towards each other like oppositely aligned magnets and meet in the centre of your body around a region known as the 'yellow court'. The 'yellow court' is an area of the energy body upon which there is much disagreement. Different teachers have placed it in different locations and associated it with different meridian points. From my own personal experience, I would place it halfway between the middle and lower Dan Tien level with a meridian point known as Zhong Wan (中脘) (Ren 12), although its exact location is not actually that important. What is important is that the energies of Kan and Li come together; this feels like a very strong magnetic pull taking place within your body. The movement from the lower

and middle Dan Tien towards the 'yellow court' is very strong and you will not miss it. It is also common to feel some kind of energetic displacement at this stage. Quite a few of my students have noted this phenomenon, though I can find no reference to it in any classical texts. When I asked my teachers about this reaction, they did indeed confirm it was a result of Li and Kan mixing. Energetic displacement is a curious sensation: it feels as though you are sitting next to yourself. This is shown in Figure 6.14. I apologize if this description is not adequate to convey intellectually what it feels like; it is difficult to put into words such unusual experiences. My only hope is that you recognize this experience if you ever have it yourself.

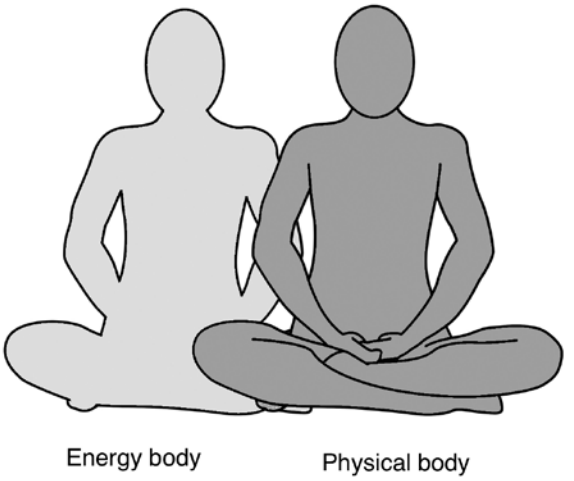


Figure 6.14: Energetic Displacement

From my own personal supposition, I see that the lower and middle Dan Tien are heavily involved in the rooting of the three bodies into one unit. The energy body is anchored to the physical body through the lower Dan Tien and the spirit body is rooted into the energy body through the middle Dan Tien. Each body is tethered to the next through the action of the Dan Tien, which also serves as a kind of 'doorway' of translation for the various frequencies as they convert upwards within each Dan Tien to the level of the next body. When Kan and Li begin to move, the points at which the bodies are anchored together are shifted and so it seems as if your energy body is moved a few inches either to the left or to the right of your physical body. During Zuo Wang it is highly likely that your level of awareness will be much more strongly connected to the energy body than the physical body, so when it shifts, a little of your awareness goes with it. To me, it feels as if

my awareness is now placed just to the side of the physical body, which is why it feels as if I am sitting next to myself. Though not classically a listed sign of Kan and Li mixing, it is an interesting experience and I hope you have the chance to experience it.

The Conversion to Heaven and Earth

Alchemically, what takes place when the two energies come together is a conversion of the two substances back to an earlier state. Kan and Li switch to Qian and Kun, or Fire and Water convert back to Heaven and Earth. This is shown in Figure 6.15.

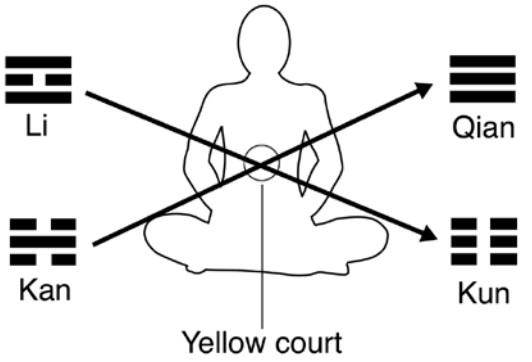


Figure 6.15: Kan and Li to Qian and Kun

Symbolically, what is happening is that the centre lines of each symbol are exchanging. The Yin line at the centre of Li switches for the Yang line at the centre of Kan, which generates the symbols of Qian and Kun. Acquired Yin and Yang change back to congenital Yin and Yang through the 'mixing of Kan and Li'. This is important for the stage of changing our attachment to the acquired mind. Kan represents the state of our mind attached to base desires, sexual wants and core belief systems that were given to us from an early age. Li represents the formation of the acquired emotional mind, likes, dislikes and attachment to things. As they merge and alchemically transform, these aspects of our nature begin to dissolve away, which allows true consciousness to start to come through into our being. This is an important phase for switching our Xing into a higher state of being. The beginning of the severing of the cords that attach us to the acquired state of being, and which we have built up, begin to break down and transformation of consciousness begins to take place. This is a

difficult stage for many as attachments to all those things we associate with the false sense of self begin to change and this results in dramatic shifts in our personality. Although this is always a positive change for you, it can be difficult for those around you who have attached themselves to the acquired version of you, which you have been projecting out into your environment. As your likes and dislikes change, so do your expressions of self and the way in which your Xing shines through. Do not take this warning lightly as this is the stage of deep transformational work around which Daoism is based. It is a complete overhaul of your character and almost always marked with life-changing conversions in your state of being. Too many people think that deep internal work will lead only to a sense of peace and inner stillness, but this is far from the truth. Although stillness does appear within your core, there is a great shake-up that needs to take place as well; for me this is the most exciting part of the process, but for others I have seen that it can be difficult.

It is often summarized by stating that Fire and Water contain the potential for two important aspects of true human consciousness – spiritual knowing and true wisdom. These two aspects of human nature are buried beneath a lifetime of acquired thinking, bias and prejudice. As the layers begin to dissolve, spiritual knowing begins to arise from within the centre of the Heart and wisdom grows within the lower abdomen. These form the basis for true understanding of the nature of reality as well as the foundation aspects of human Xing which lead to the emergence of the virtuous De.

The Dragon and the Tiger

The green dragon and the white tiger are two symbols that appear time and time again in Nei Dan literature. They are closely linked to the stage of 'mixing Kan and Li' and also have associations with other aspects of the energetic and spiritual system. They are two of the four key animals representing the Wu Xing elemental energies, the other two being the red phoenix and the black turtle (sometimes enwrapped in a snake). These four animals are each connected to an element as shown in Figure 6.16. These are the same four animals that can be seen around the edge of the Xiu Zhen Tu. Earth lies at the centre of the other four elements and does not have an animal associated with it.

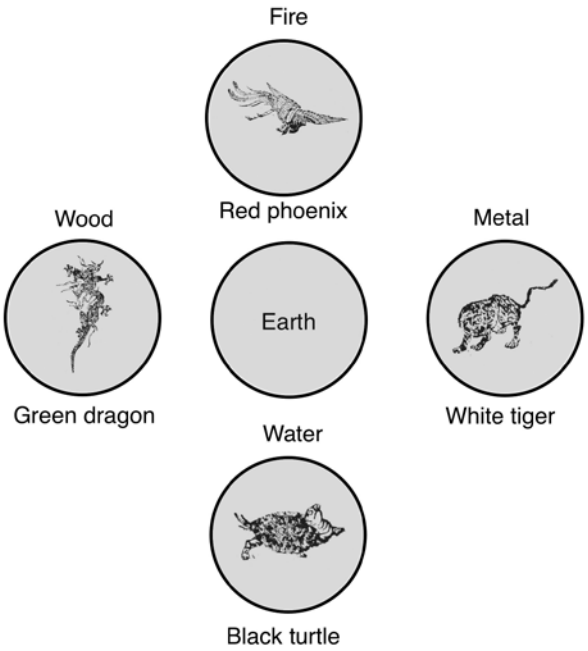


Figure 6.16: The Four Alchemical Animals

We will return to the elemental associations and their spiritual meanings in the next chapter when we discuss the stage of 'merging the five elements'. For this stage of development, it is the green dragon and the white tiger that are important. These two animals refer to a powerful alchemical change which takes place within the practitioner's spirit during the 'mixing of Kan and Li', and represent the movement of the central lines of the Kan and Li symbols and the deeper meanings of what these represent in the human psyche.

The green dragon is said to reside within the region of the Heart while the white tiger resides within the region of the lower abdomen. This associates the green dragon with the Li symbol and the white tiger with the Kan symbol. This is also sometimes written as 'wood residing within fire' and 'metal residing within water'. The central line of each of the two symbols represents the invading element and either the green dragon or the white tiger. These animals rest in the positions of Kan and Li only within the acquired mind. This is shown in Figure 6.17.

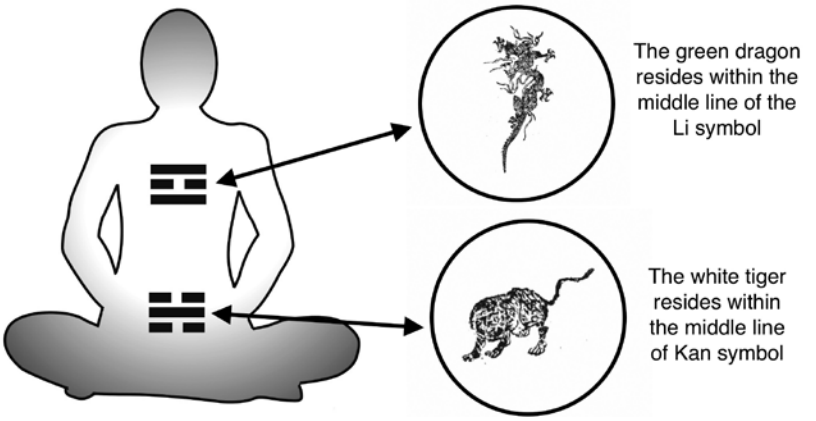

The green dragon resides within the middle line of the Li symbol
The white tiger resides within the middle line of Kan symbol

Figure 6.17: The Residences of the Dragon and Tiger

When Kan and Li begin to mix together within the 'yellow court' region of the body, it is said that the 'copulation of dragon and tiger' begins. Further description states that they copulate by blowing smoke and fire into a Ding. The dragon breathes red fire and the tiger blows blue smoke. On top of both creatures ride a boy and a girl; the girl rides the dragon and the boy rides the tiger. This is usually represented in the manner of Figure 6.18 below, with both creatures breathing into a Ding.



Figure 6.18: The Copulation of Dragon and Tiger

A great deal of information is contained in this image if you understand the symbols and their hidden meaning. The green dragon is the Yin line in the centre of Li. Yin is represented by the girl riding the dragon's back. This shows that although the dragon is a Yang creature representing movement and strength, it is ultimately harnessed through mastery of Yin quiescence, which we achieve through accessing the stillness within the centre of our Heart in Zuo Wang. The white tiger is the Yang line within the centre of Kan. Although the tiger represents Yin, it must be harnessed through Yang, which is why it is being ridden by the boy. We access this energy through awakening the congenital fluid of the lower cauldron into action when we attain 'martial breathing'. The red fire of the dragon is the energy of Fire being breathed into the Ding of the yellow court, while the blue smoke of the tiger is the energy of Water entering the Ding. Whenever we have a Ding within Nei Dan texts or artwork, it shows that an alchemical change is taking place. The coming together of these two entities within the 'yellow court' is what brings about change. As the two creatures 'copulate' in this way, the central lines of the symbols switch around and true Yin and Yang, Qian and Kun, are produced.

The red fire and blue smoke represent another aspect of the practice, which is the visual sign associated with attainment of this stage. Within the mind's eye, the meeting of Kan and Li results in you looking out into a vibrant blue colour. This is much like looking up into a clear blue sky. This colour appears while you are sitting there with your eyes closed and it stays for several minutes before red flecks start to appear within the blue. You should simply sit and observe this the first few times when you reach this stage so that your body can get used to what is happening. What you are seeing is your brain's interpretation of the vibratory information contained within the reaction taking place between Kan and Li. Note that once again it should never be imagined or created with the mind. This occurrence will come on its own when you reach the required developmental stage in your practice.

The green dragon and the white tiger also represent the Hun and the Po, the two halves of the human soul. By 'mixing Kan and Li' we help to free the Hun and the Po from the tethers of the Shen and the Zhi. This becomes very important for the next stages of Nei Dan training.

The Hare and the Raven

Different alchemical traditions each used their own metaphorical terminology and sometimes it can become confusing if using Nei Dan writings from different schools. Some of my favourite imagery is that of the hare and the raven. Like the dragon and the tiger, the hare and the raven represent the inherent energies contained within the centre of Li and Kan. The hare is said to reside within the moon while the raven resides within the centre of the red sun. The moon represents Water and the lower abdominal region while the red sun represents the element of Fire and the Heart region. The hare is the potential for Yang within the Yin of Water and the raven is the potential for Yin within the Yang of Fire.

When the hare and the raven interact with each other, they come together to generate change within the Xin or 'Heart-mind' of the practitioner. This is shown in Figure 6.19.

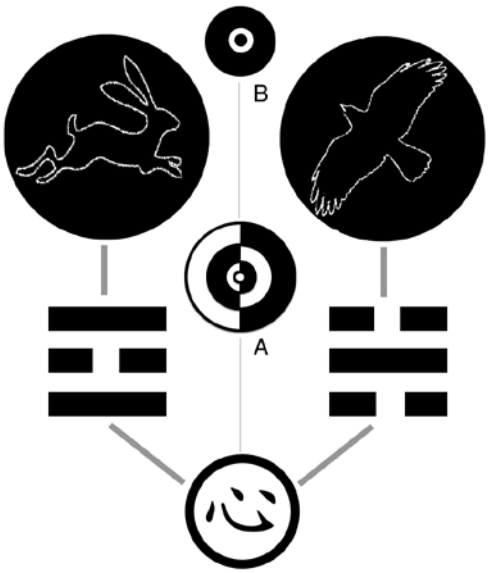


Figure 6.19: The Hare and the Raven

Figure 6.19 shows the coming together of Li and Kan into the Xin, which is often represented by the symbol marked A. This symbol appears in many alchemical texts and is almost always a sign for the merging or division of the transient aspects of acquired mind. The symbol marked B shows the symbol for the emergence of the hare from the moon and the raven from the sun. Although I like the imagery of the hare and the raven, I have stayed

with the more common dragon and tiger symbols in this book. Essentially, they are discussing the same stage, and I have only included them here to help with understanding some of the alchemical terminology contained within classical texts.

Chapter 7

WOMEN-SPECIFIC NEI DAN

Sadly, there is very little written on the practice of women-specific Qi Gong, Nei Gong or Nei Dan at the current time. Women have several differences in the way that their energy systems work compared with men's; this presents several unique strengths and challenges. In ancient times there was a whole different branch of alchemy for women entitled Nu Dan (女丹), but the surviving writings from this school of thought contain little more than very basic instructions on Qi Gong exercises for health maintenance. As a result, women are left with only male-orientated practices and writings which, while they will work for them, do not maximize the potential of the energy circulating within the female energy body. Although it is beyond the scope of this book to give a full description of the many practices that are specific to women (that is a later project!), this chapter gives some changes that women can make to the Nei Dan process described in this book to make the process more efficient for them.

GENDER-BASED JING MOVEMENT

The societal concept of women is a strange thing. It seems that in ancient times there was a strong emphasis on the inherent spiritual power of women. The natural sensitivity of the female spirit contains the potential for women to be very powerful mystics and it appears that this was acknowledged in our distant past. The worship of the female energy of the planet was widespread, but then this all shifted. Masculine power took over and the world become 'male-dominated'. This has carried through into modern times, with varying degrees of oppression of women still being the norm across the world. This oppression can vary between sexist stereotypes of women through to their objectification as sexual objects and the extreme oppression of women practised in various regions of the world. Sadly, this has meant that almost all writings in most traditions around the world are also male-biased.

The fact is that male and female bodies work very differently on both a physical and energetic level. Focusing on the energetic level, we can see that, while the majority of the orbits of the meridian system are the same, there are some key differences that need to be understood by women practitioners of Nei Dan.

The first is the relative dominance of Yin and Yang within the upper and lower body. The difference between men and women is shown in Figure 7.1.

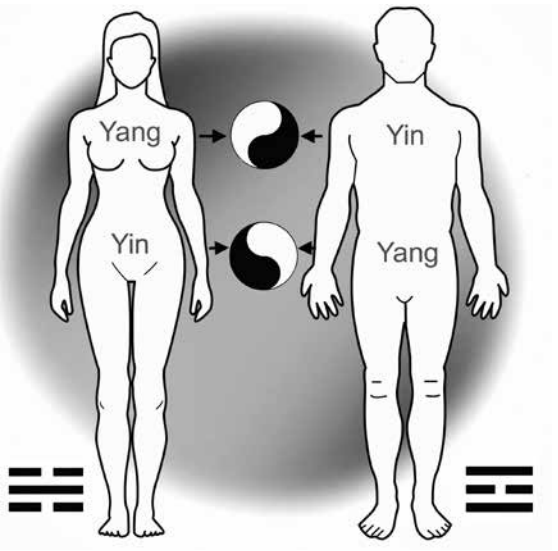


Figure 7.1: Male and Female Yin Yang Balance

Within women's bodies the lower aspect of the body is Yin while their chest region is Yang. For men it is reversed: their chest is Yin while their lower torso is Yang. This is easy to understand if we look at the physical anatomy of both genders. In the Yang area of the female chest are the breasts which protrude, whereas the male chest is comparatively flat and Yin. The vagina extends into the body which is Yin, and the male penis extends from the body which is Yang. The anatomical nature of male and female bodies makes for a large difference in the way that acquired Jing flows within women compared with the basic description given in the earlier chapters of this book. Although it is still true that congenital Jing from around the area between the Kidneys moves into the perineum region in both genders, there is then a difference in the flow from this region. Male Jing moves from here into the length of the penis and into the testicles where the acquired

Jing is stored ready for ejaculation. Like men, women store their essence in several places in their body. First, like men, their congenital Jing is stored within Ming Men, the space between their Kidneys. This is the point in the body where the vibrating energy of Jing is converted into different substances. From here it produces Qi within the lower Dan Tien, menstrual blood via the Tian Gui (天癸) within the Uterus and sexual fluids which reside around the vagina. These products of Jing are shown in Figure 7.2.

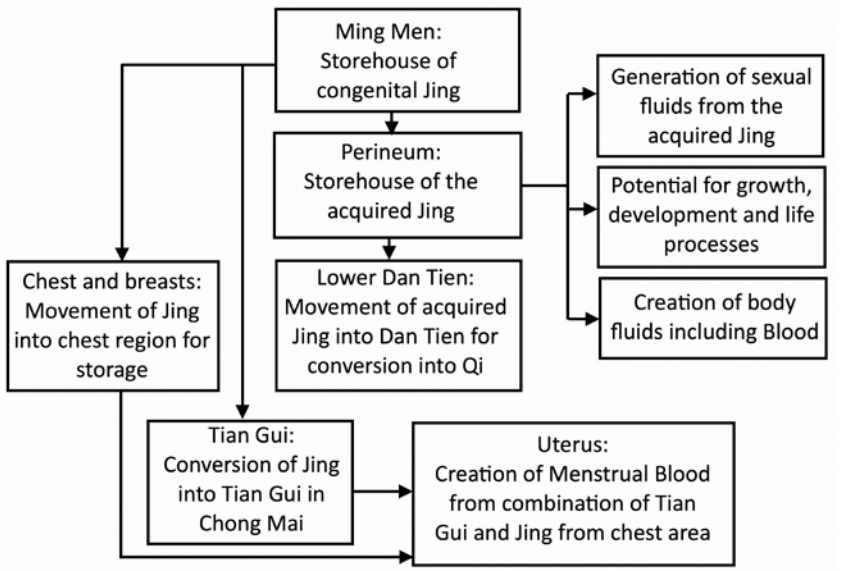

Ming Men: Storehouse of congenital Jing
Perineum: Storehouse of the acquired Jing
Lower Dan Tien: Movement of acquired Jing into Dan Tien for conversion into Qi
Chest and breasts: Movement of Jing into chest region for storage
Tian Gui: Conversion of Jing into Tian Gui in Chong Mai
Uterus: Creation of Menstrual Blood from combination of Tian Gui and Jing from chest area
Generation of sexual fluids from the acquired Jing
Potential for growth, development and life processes
Creation of body fluids including Blood

Figure 7.2: Products of Jing within the Body

This is generally understood in most Chinese internal schools. What is often missed, though, is the movement of essence upwards into the breasts. Women's breasts form a powerful storehouse of essence which is focused towards the nipples. It is this essence that then converts into milk which is given to the woman's children during breastfeeding. Women's essence within this region is transported upwards into the breasts via the Chong Mai, the powerful central meridian which thrusts upwards through the core of the body from our perineum to the crown of our head. An easy way to picture it is to think of the bar that runs through a carousel horse. This vertical bar runs through the core of our body, carrying essential substances up from the base of our abdomen into the head via the three Dan Tien energy centres. Running out from the female Chong Mai are two branches that connect it to the nipples and then spread across the surface of the breasts as shown in Figure 7.3.

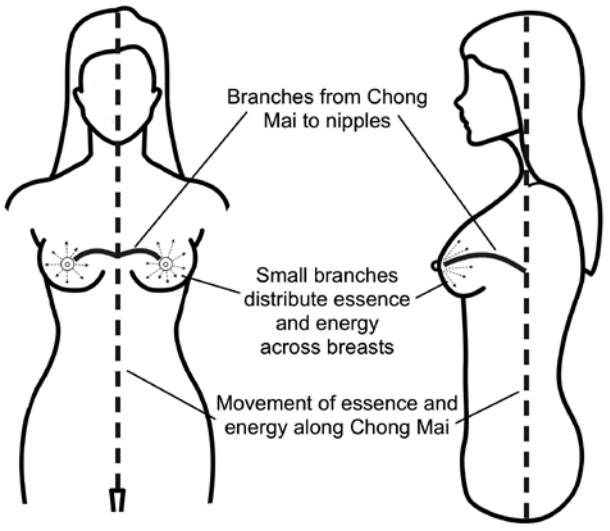

Branches from Chong Mai to nipples
Small branches distribute essence and energy across breasts
Movement of essence and energy along Chong Mai

Figure 7.3: The Breasts and the Chong Mai

This essence, like the Jing that forms the sexual fluids, is strongly linked to a woman's sexuality as well as various other psycho-spiritual factors. If a woman has an abundance of Jing, then the breasts will remain firm, stick out slightly and not sag. When women are in their teenage years and their twenties, they should have plenty of Jing and this should be the case. As they age, this Jing sinks down to replace the Jing lost within the lower body, resulting in the sagging of the breasts and a loss of energy around the area of the chest. A major aspect of women's restorative practices should involve massaging the breasts in a specific way to stimulate the Jing stored within them. This helps to uplift the essence, which preserves youth and slows the ageing process. These massage techniques are discussed below as they are important adjunct practices to help with the consolidation of Jing around the chest region which becomes important for Nei Dan practice.

The breasts are powerful emotional centres for women as well. They store the aspect of feminine spirit closely connected to confidence with their feminine nature. During purging practices working with the breasts, it is common for women to release old, stuck traumas connected to insults they have received about their physical appearance, especially with regard to their perceived sexuality. Massaging the breasts will help these stuck energies to leave the body and stimulate the acquired Jing to circulate healthily in this region. Beneath the breasts sit the areas of the energy body closely connected with a woman's sense of sexual guilt. In society there tends to be a real sense of negativity towards women's sexuality. Women are often

discouraged from expressing their sexuality and yet at the same time are encouraged to look like photographic models who are overtly sexual in their appearance. This confusing message places guilt on to women for wanting to look and act in a way they are both expected to be and also despised for being. 'You must look like a sexual object and yet not act in a sexual way because this is the behaviour of a prostitute' is the message society gives. This adds to the depletion of Jing and the collapse of a woman's personal confidence. Again, women must work towards clearing this stagnation. The health of the breasts and their ability to store energy is affected by how emotionally nourished she was when young, and her relationship with key parental figures in her life, among other factors. Breast conditions such as masses and lumps can result as a long-term build-up of these emotional traumas.

The close connection of acquired Jing to the chest region is also important because it links the area of emotional movement to the essence. Overly strong stimulation within the Heart centre will have a draining effect upon women, more so than in the case of men. A larger degree of male essence is linked into their lower energy centre which governs their base desires, particularly those linked to sexual desires and addictions to substances or activities. What this means is that men and women will lose their acquired Jing in different ways. This has a profound effect on the nature of working with the foundation stages of Nei Dan practice: men will struggle to work with the stages around the lower energy centre, whereas women will tend to struggle around the stages connected to the middle energy centre. Having now taught many people internal alchemical practices, I can certainly see that this tends to be the case. Men will often fall down in the early stages; in fact, many of them cannot get past the '100 day virgin boy training' as their base desires prevent them from storing their acquired Jing for that long. They then struggle to still the Kan elemental aspect of the body as the movement from the perineum up into the lower Ding is difficult. It requires a certain degree of will power over engaging in excess sexual activity, especially as there is the tendency during the early stages towards the movement of Jing raising a practitioner's sex drive by a high degree. Women generally do not have too much difficulty with building this foundation and can achieve the 'firing process' much more simply. In my experience, it seems to take them about half the time of male practitioners; of course, this is a generalization and there are always exceptions. Women then struggle to silence the movements of the acquired mind and disconnect from the emotional aspects of their being when it comes to the 'mixing of Kan and Li'. The higher level of

natural connection women have to this region means that they tend towards having a higher amount of internal sensitivity, but they are more prone to allowing their emotional energies to get involved in the stage of trying to bring stillness to the Li aspect of their energy body. It should be noted that neither of these inherent difficulties should be seen as better or worse; they are both simply challenges linked to the way in which male and female energy moves and where Jing resides within the body.

TIAN GUI

Jing is also heavily involved in a woman's menstrual cycle. This is because Jing converts into a 'substance' called Tian Gui. This is difficult to translate directly into English. Tian means Heaven and so connects the substance of Tian Gui into the Heavenly realm. In this case it denotes Tian Gui as a congenital substance, something gifted from Heaven, prior to your birth. This shows that it is created from your congenital Jin. Gui is a Chinese term referring to one of the ten Heavenly stems. This is a system of categorizing the Yin and Yang qualities of the five elemental energies of Fire, Earth, Metal, Water and Wood. Each element is divided into both Yin and Yang, and then assigned a term denoting their order within a sequence of development; together these are known as the Tian Gan (天干) or ten Heavenly stems. Gui refers to 'Yin Water', meaning that it is a substance (Yin) linked to the Kidneys (Water). When Jing converts into Tian Gui, this is the point of ethereal vibration frequency converting into an actual physical substance, which, in the case of women, is menstrual blood. Figure 7.4 shows the process of conversion from Jing to Tian Gui to menstrual blood.

It is for this reason that menstruation is the key way in which women are said to lose their acquired Jing. In a way this balances out the Jing lost by men through ejaculation, meaning that if men regulated their sexual activity adequately, they should use up their essence at the same speed as women and therefore should not have a tendency to die younger. It is important to note that menstrual blood was said to be formed from the Tian Gui, which was essentially the Yin aspect of the Jing produced from the Kidneys. The Yang aspect of the Jing from the Kidneys goes on to form the sexual fluids, which is why the Kidney Yang aspect is closely linked to a person's sex drive in Chinese medical thought.

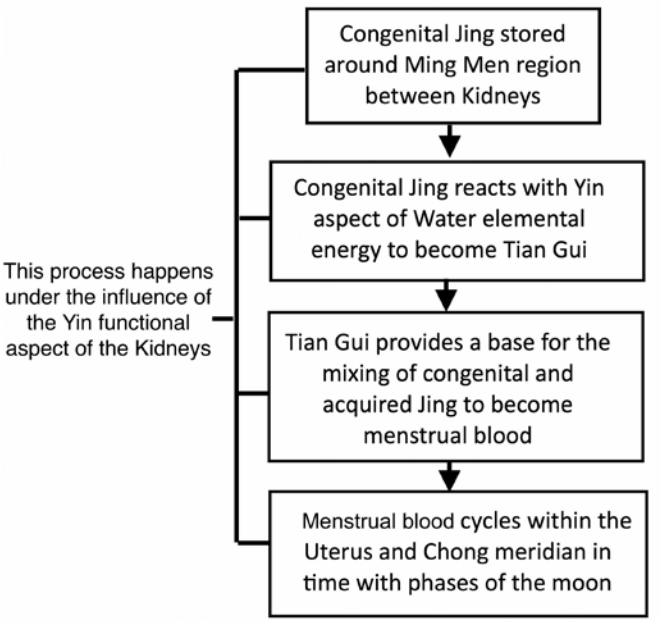

Congenital Jing stored around Ming Men region between Kidneys
Congenital Jing reacts with Yin aspect of Water elemental energy to become Tian Gui
This process happens under the influence of the Yin functional aspect of the Kidneys
Tian Gui provides a base for the mixing of congenital and acquired Jing to become menstrual blood
Menstrual blood cycles within the Uterus and Chong meridian in time with phases of the moon

Figure 7.4: The Conversion of Tian Gui

The movement and creation of menstrual blood from Tian Gui is closely linked to the cycles of the moon which is the key astral body governing women. When the moon is full, Qi and Blood (including menstrual blood) moves upwards within the body. Energy is focused towards the head, meaning that people are more likely to experience emotional shifts at this time. Those with psychiatric illnesses are more likely to struggle with controlling them around the time of the full moon, a concept that gave birth to the term lunatics or 'lunar-tics'. As the moon moves towards a new moon, the Qi and Blood sink down in the body. A woman's menstrual blood experiences a powerful pull from the Uterus and this causes a woman to shed her menstrual blood for a few days. The health of a woman's Jing and her connection to environmental cycles dictates whether or not she is in line with the cycles of the moon. The ideal is to fully align your menstruation with the new moon so that the downwards-acting energy of the moon's field enhances menstruation rather than works against it. The more effectively a woman can align herself with the energy of the new moon, the more cleansing her menstruation is and the more her Jing is preserved.

FEMALE BODY FLUIDS

What all this means is that men and women should place different levels of importance upon different bodily fluids and substances during their practice. It is Jing that goes on to create the various fluids within the body, which are then supplemented through acquired substances in the form of the food and drink we consume. The Jing is largely responsible for the creation of both sexual fluids and Blood, and this is where the major difference comes into play for male and female practice. Men need to focus upon the conservation and recirculation of sexual fluids through their system, whereas women should focus on the governance and extraction of Jing from their Blood. This is summarized in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1: Male and Female Substances

	Male	**Female**
Foundation Stages	Focus on sexual fluids	Focus on Blood
Intermediate Stages	Focus on circulation of Qi	Focus on circulation of Qi
Advanced Stages	Focus on Shen	Focus on Shen

In Daoist thought, Blood transfers the information from our spirit through the rest of our bodily system out to the physical tissues and organs. While emotional shifts will change the nature of our Qi, the movements of the five spirits are refracted into the Blood, which serves to root it into the rest of the system. This was an ancient Daoist belief that has carried through even into contemporary Chinese medicine. These circulations of Qi and Blood are then affected to varying degrees by the environmental cycles taking place around us all the time. The various interactions between us and our immediate environment are studied in Chinese medicine through the theory of the external climatic energies, but the more 'Heaven-based' circulations are not usually taken into account to the same degree. In general, Qi is largely affected by the movement of the sun as well as the shifting of the seasons, whereas Blood and sexual fluids are affected strongly by the cycles of the moon. In the case of sexual fluids, there will be individual tendencies towards different levels of sexual drive according to the cycles of the moon. These changes in sexual drive will vary according to the relative balance of Yin and Yang within a person's body, which is then reflected in the moon phase, although on the whole there will be a tendency towards a higher sexual drive around the full moon. In the case of Blood, it tends to rise

upwards with regard to its energetic potential around the full moon and sink around the new moon. For men, this will cause a general decrease in physical strength around the new moon, but for women the effects can be more complex.

WOMEN AND THE MOON PHASES

The majority of ancient cultures connected feminine energy to the moon and the Daoists were no exception. They understood that although both genders were connected to its various phases, it was a far greater concern for women to work with the energy of the moon because it was largely the Blood that was affected by the energy coming down from the moon's surface. Figure 7.5 shows the two key phases of the moon and their associated effects.

As stated above, it is best for a woman's energetic system if her menstrual cycle can be brought in line with the phases of the moon; this will help with the earliest stages of Nei Dan training as well as improving overall health. Since there is a large storehouse of Jing for women around the area of their chest, there is a close connection between their emotional centre and their essence. This means that it is particularly important for women to shed emotional debris left from emotional swings which are so often stored within the energy body. One important way for this purge to take place is during menstruation when, over the course of a few days, they lose Blood which carries with it emotional information that the body wants rid of. This means that menstruation should be a powerful form of spiritual cleansing for women, providing that they are healthy and their internal system is properly balanced. Once they reach the age where their menstrual cycle has ended, they should have purged enough in this manner and now their spirits should begin to flourish in the stage of life for women known as the 'second spring'. In order for the positive effects of menstruation to be at their most efficient, menstruation should be in line with the phase of the new moon and the few days surrounding it. This means that the downwards sinking energy of the lunar environment combines with the shedding of the menstrual blood from the Uterus. Whether or not a woman is in line with this cycle will vary according to the relative level of balance of Yin and Yang within her system as well as the health of her Uterus.

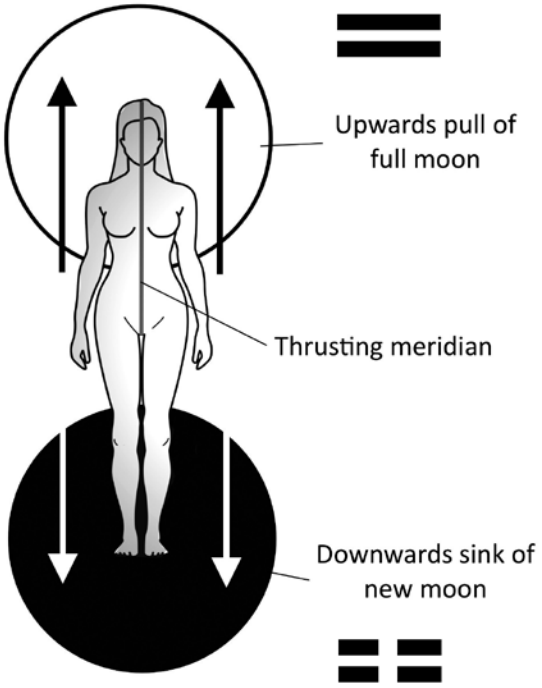


Figure 7.5: Full and New Moon

LUNAR GAZING

An easy method for aligning the menstrual cycle with the moon is to learn how to 'lunar gaze'. This practice is from the Shen Gong (神功) aspect of the Daoist arts, which is a system translated as 'skill of working with the spirit'. Shen Gong exercises are some of the most abstract of all Daoist practices as they generally involve connection of the spirit to various entities; they also combine the use of hand positions, breathing methods, stepping patterns and other more esoteric aspects of the tradition. Shen Gong exercises work because they are empowered practices handed down through the ages; they are a direct link back to Daoism's shamanic roots. It can take a lifetime of cultivation before a person is able to work fully with Shen Gong methods, but some of the more simple practices can be accessed early on, particularly by women, who have a higher degree of natural sensitivity and a strong connection to environmental energies. One such practice is 'lunar gazing', which is very simple and useful for all women to get used to.

In order to 'lunar gaze', a woman needs to go outside and look up at the moon every two to three nights over the course of a full lunar month. If she is able to go every night, then that is even better. Between the hours of 11pm and 1am is the best time to practise, although this can be difficult

for many due to life commitments, so it is OK to go as soon as it gets dark. When trying this practice, a woman should go out and stand in a correct Qi Gong posture and look up towards the moon. Try to still the mind and be as calm as possible as you do this. Simply look up to the moon and place your awareness upon it in the same way that you may lightly drop your awareness into the lower Dan Tien during Qi Gong or Nei Dan practice. Breathe deeply and then, after a few minutes of looking up at the moon, gently bring your awareness back to rest upon the Heart centre and lightly keep your mind there while still looking at the moon. Stay with this practice for around 20 minutes and then close down as you would normally for any Qi Gong training. Repeat this process over the course of a lunar month, beginning with the full moon and returning to the full moon through the entire lunar cycle.

For the first few times you try this, little will happen. After some time, though, you will find that there begins a slight magnetic pull between you and the moon as you bring your mind back into the Heart centre. It can even sometimes be strong enough to pull you forward off your feet; if this happens, don't worry, it is all part of the process.

When you get around to the full moon for the second time, you should stay with it for longer, as long as is comfortable. If you have been successful, then the moon will go through the four stages shown in Figure 7.6.

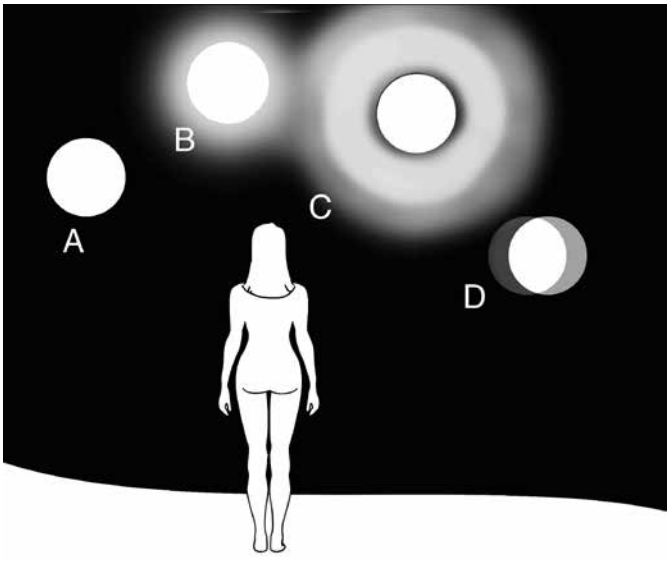


Figure 7.6: The Full Moon Gazing Phases

Your connection to the moon will cause your perception to take the energy of the moon into four different states. Image A shows the full moon in its normal state when you look at it. After some time it will switch into image B, which will result in a light glow beginning to be emitted from its border. This glow is different from the usual halo of light that the moon gives off because it will pulse and expand outwards to a higher degree. Some women have reported that this halo turns purple after a few minutes, although this seems to vary from person to person. After some time it will move into image C, whereby the glow will expand out from the moon like a ring and separate from the moon's border. This halo will pulse; some women have even told me that they can hear it as a low hum when they focus upon it, though I have never heard this myself. Image D is the final stage, whereby the moon begins to flicker and look as if it is shaking up and down or side to side. This rapid movement shows a full connection between your perception and the moon's energy. The Shen and Blood will be nourished by this connection and begin to change the way in which your body reacts with the moon's cycle. If you have no luck and do not connect with this reaction on the return of the full moon, then don't worry. Try again and repeat the process until you gain the desired results.

It is obviously best to try this practice at a time of year when you have no cloud in the sky as cloud will obscure your visual line of sight to the moon. If you find that a day or two are cloudy, then don't worry: try to connect up to the point where you know the moon would be, but obviously the most effective time is when the moon can be seen clearly.

There is a lot more to the full 'lunar gazing' practice, such as postures and mental exercises which work with various aspects of your energy system, but this brief introductory version of the exercise should be enough for you to begin to connect with the moon and so have an effect on your menstrual cycle. It is normal within a few consecutive months of practising this method for your menstrual cycle to begin to change quite drastically. You should begin to menstruate with the new moon phase of the cycle. If you already menstruate with the new moon, then this can still be a good practice to go through a few times, and women past the age of menstruating should also practise it a few times as there are still cycles of the Blood linked to the moon taking place within the Chong Mai.

In past times people spent a lot of their life outdoors and so connection with the environment was naturally much stronger. Nowadays we tend to spend more and more of our life indoors, isolated from the natural world.

Simple practices such as 'lunar gazing' can help women to reconnect with this energy which can bring drastic changes to their internal rhythms.

The Lunar Cycle and the Firing Process

A major function of the 'firing process' is to alter the way in which the Jing circulates and converts within the body. For male practitioners, this is simply a conversion within the lower cauldron which then circulates along the 'small water wheel' of the Du and Ren meridians. For women, there are other concerns involved as they also need to return the Jing from the Uterus area and the menstrual blood back up into the area of the chest and breasts. This means that they have a two-stage practice when it comes to the 'firing process', which alters the way in they should engage with this practice. These two stages of alchemical practice should be timed with the phases of the moon in order to take advantage of the rising and sinking energies of the lunar cycle. Figure 7.7 shows a summary of the effects of the lunar cycle upon the 'firing process'.

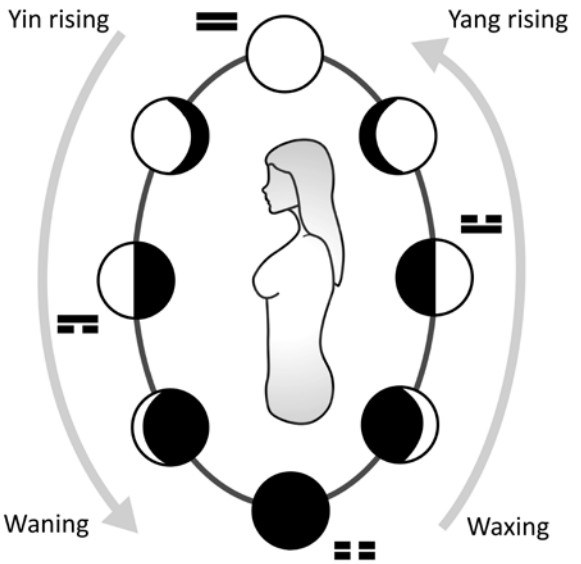


Figure 7.7: Lunar Phases and the Firing Process

Note that in Figure 7.7 I have shown the lunar phases for the northern hemisphere. This means that the waxing phase of the moon is shown along the back of the body and the waning phase is shown on the front of the body. If you live in the southern hemisphere, the practice will still be the

same. It is the waxing and waning that are important: waxing is always with the back of the body. In alchemical language, the movement from the new moon towards the full moon is known as the stage of Yang rising. The movement from the full moon to the new moon is known as Yin rising. The four two-line *Yi Jing* symbols around the diagram show the symbols often attached to classical charts denoting the four key stages of the lunar cycle within Nei Dan training.

As the moon moves towards being full, it naturally has a lifting effect on the body, which makes it easier for the standard part of the 'firing process' to be practised. This is the method outlined in Chapter 5. During this phase of the lunar cycle women should practise the same method as men and work towards establishing the same circulation of congenital fluid around the 'small water wheel'. All the same signs of progress apply to their practice because they also need to circulate Jing in this manner and awaken the lower cauldron.

The difference arises during the waning phase of the moon when the Yin rising phase begins. At this stage there is a natural sinking of the body's energy and the Blood begins to move downwards within the Chong Mai towards the Uterus. For men, this phase of the moon makes little difference and they should continue with their regular method. For women, there is nothing wrong with continuing with the 'firing process' in the normal manner, but there is another very efficient practice they can use instead. Perhaps when you first start learning Nei Dan, you should work on the regular 'firing process' for the first few months, regardless of the lunar cycle, in order to allow your body to get used to it, but after the first few months switch practices on the Yin rising stage of the moon's movements in order to get the most from your practice. The practice attached to the sinking energy of the moon is known as opening the 'wind path'.

The Wind Path

The 'wind path' is a channel that runs up from the area within the Uterus where Tian Gui becomes menstrual blood to connect with the Ren meridian on the front of a woman's body. The practice of awakening the 'wind path' is used to extract Jing from this area of the body and return it upwards towards the chest area where it is stored within the chest and breasts. This is to help prevent the loss of excessive Jing during menstruation and to help stimulate energetic expansion around the Heart which will in turn lead to better emotional health. The stronger the essence around the region of the

Heart, the closer a woman will come to stilling the centre of the Li symbol. Figure 7.8 shows the movement of the 'wind path'.

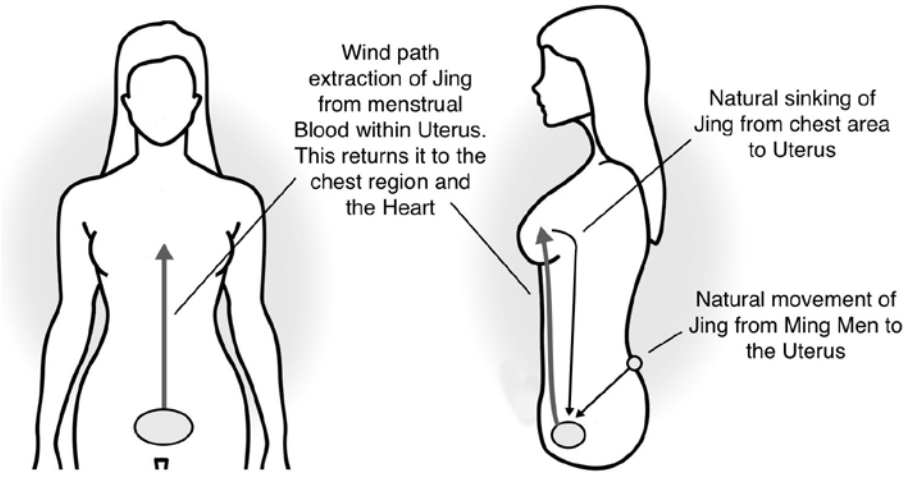


Figure 7.8: The Wind Path

In order to practise the 'wind path', a women should wait until the moon enters the 'Yin rising' phase of its cycle. Then, instead of working on the lower cauldron section of the 'firing process', she should lightly bring her mind up to the region of the chest. There is an acupuncture point in the centre of the chest known as Shan Zhong (Ren 17) which sits directly in front of the middle Dan Tien. It is this region of the chest where the awareness should rest. In order to locate this, you should bring your mind up to the chest region between the breasts at the level of the heart. Place your awareness on the skin in this region and just gently trace your mind around this region until you find a point that generates a light sensation when your mind touches upon it. This will be either a feeling of slight warmth in this location or a gentle feeling as if you are lightly touching the point with your finger. When you have this point, rest your awareness there and simply allow the body to do what it wants. Make sure you do not go deeply into the chest cavity as this can lead to stagnation of the 'wind path' at this stage in your training. Simply keep it on the surface of the skin so that the point can cause a reaction between your mind and the middle Dan Tien. Now try to stay with the body and observe what takes place. You should find that after a short while the movement of the energy begins to reverse and the flow of warmth actually rises up the front of the body rather than the rear. There will be a movement of heat which travels from the

inside of the lower abdomen, out towards the surface of the body and then up into the region of the Heart along the Ren meridian. This warmth can then continue out across the surface of the breasts and to the nipples, which may become a little swollen at first. When you reach the stage of moving the congenital fluid, the warm bubbling liquid from the lower Ding, this should also rise along this path to the breasts as well.

Throughout this process you should only really have to focus upon the Shan Zhong point and the rest should happen of its own accord. You can breathe normally and do not require manipulation of the perineum and lower abdomen as in the case of the regular 'firing process'. This practice should continue in the same manner until it is time to move on to the 'martial fire' in the same way as before. Note that Zuo Wang should be applied as normal; all you are doing is switching the first aspect of the 'firing process' for the 'wind path' during the Yin rising stage of the lunar cycle. This should mean that your practice is 15 days of the 'firing process' and 15 days of the 'wind path' each lunar month.

This method should then extract the acquired Jing from the region of the Uterus and return it to the breasts in order to nourish them. This is an important practice as it helps to overcome the biggest area of difficulty for women in their Nei Dan practice. Men require a lot of work to change the Kan, the Water aspect of their body, whereas women need also to build a foundation here but focus on the balancing of the Li, the Fire aspect, instead. If you can understand these processes, then you will understand the differences between male and female Nei Dan.

As the warmth reaches the region of the breasts, it should cause a feeling of happiness. The movement of Qi out from this region as the Heart is nourished should feel uplifting; when I teach this, it is usual for me to see gentle smiles begin to appear on the faces of the female students. The only exception is if there are emotional traumas sitting right on the surface of the Heart region which are ready to be expelled from the body; then they will come out with a feeling of sadness and usually some tears. This does not last long, usually a couple of sitting sessions until the Heart is open enough for the Jing to move into it. After this the Heart should begin to expand Qi out in all directions. If this happens, it is normal for your attention to begin to drift outwards in a spherical fashion away from the Shan Zhong point. Don't worry; the expansion is enough to continue the 'wind path', so just go with it. When the feeling of expansion eases away, return to your practice as before.

Slaying the Red Dragon

The rather unsubtle term in Nei Dan of 'slaying the red dragon' refers to the ending of menstruation. The logic was that since women primarily lost their Jing through menstrual blood, it was sensible to try to end their monthly bleed. By reversing various energetic flows within the body, women end menstruation and this was often considered a prerequisite for women's Nei Dan training. It is actually a very simple practice, which takes only a few months to achieve and is very powerful, but I am against it for lay practitioners of Nei Dan. For those living as renunciates away from society, it is probably a perfectly OK practice to engage in, but for those living in normal society (as I suspect most people reading this book are), it carries with it several major risks. Blood stagnation in the body can lead to many different physical issues as well as emotional imbalances. I have now met quite a few women from other schools who have managed to 'slay the red dragon' and most of them had major health issues as a result of the practice. There are always going to be exceptions – and if you are one of those women who has successfully practised this method without any difficulties, then well done – but on the whole I would advise against it. Life brings emotional difficulty with it and the clearing effects of menstruation prevent the energetic residues of these experiences blocking up the Heart and damaging the sensitive Uterus.

Instead, what should take place for female practitioners of the 'wind path' is a balancing of the menstrual cycle. If your bleed is too heavy, it should lighten a little, and vice versa. Experience has shown me that, in the majority of cases, women will find that their menstrual bleed lightens a little as a result of the practice. Any excessive darkness and clots in the menstrual blood should lessen as well. Negative symptoms associated with menstruation should also alleviate, including any cramps or emotional swings prior to the menstrual bleed starting. The most important factor here is that any change that occurs in your menstrual cycle should be a natural side effect of your connection to the moon's energy through 'lunar gazing' and through awakening of the 'wind path'. Nothing should be forced through excessively controlling methods.

Another change that should occur from the 'wind path' is a tightening and slight shrinking of the breasts. As the Jing gathers within this region, there will be a slight inwards gathering of the essence in the chest region, which pulls the breasts inwards. This will have the effect of causing them to shrink and become firmer. This is a natural result of the 'wind path' which

takes place regardless of a woman's age and is nothing to be concerned about.

BREAST MASSAGE

In order to aid the gathering of Jing in the region of the chest, women practitioners of Nei Dan should massage their breasts daily. There are various ways in which to massage the breasts in order to stimulate different energetic results, but the two most important methods for Nei Dan are outlined below.

Method 1

Place your hands on your breasts with the palms over your nipples. Breathe deeply and place your awareness into your hands. Then begin to rotate the breasts upwards and outwards in smooth circles. The direction is shown in Figure 7.9.

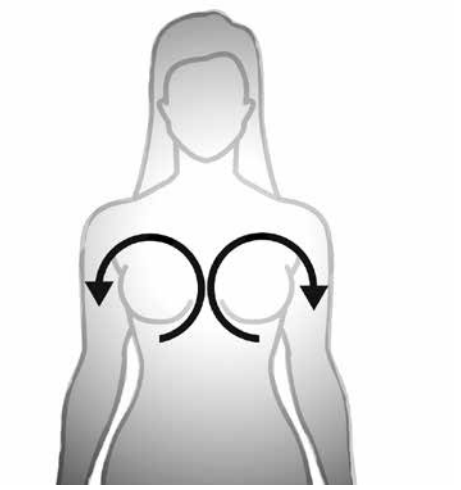


Figure 7.9: The Direction of Breast Massage

You should carry out this massage for five minutes in the morning when you wake up and for five minutes at night before you sleep. After some practice you will find that your breasts begin to grow warm and will eventually maintain this warmth through the day. This is a sign of the Jing, Qi and Blood moving healthily in this region of the body.

Method 2

Using the ends of your fingers, rub up and down on the area of your chest between the breasts. You should rub quite rapidly up and down over the Shan Zhong area until it becomes warm. This should be carried out for a few minutes in the morning when you wake up and before you go to bed at night. It is also useful to do after any practice of the 'wind path' exercise. This massage technique helps to consolidate the Jing within the chest region as well as open up the flow of Qi through the Shan Zhong meridian point.

MENSTRUAL ISSUES WITH NEI DAN

Menstruation and the effects it has upon general energy levels can be a major issue for many female practitioners of the internal arts. After some time working with exercises such as 'lunar gazing' or the 'wind path', the menstrual cycle should begin to regulate itself and then it is no longer an issue. Up until this point, though, many women suffer with a lack of energy and drive before, during and sometimes after they have been menstruating. This can make direct work with the internal body quite difficult sometimes. In order to work effectively with these issues, you should learn how to listen to your body and work with it in the most efficient manner. Pushing through tiredness when working in the internal arts is counter-productive because tiredness is generally a sign of Qi deficiency of some sort. When you push through the tiredness, you deplete the Qi even more and so the problem is made worse.

First, before discussing menstruation and its effects upon Nei Dan, we should be clear about the 'wind path' practice. The switching of practices between the 'firing process' and the 'wind path' should follow the phases of the moon, not your menstrual cycle. Even if your menstrual cycle is in reverse and you bleed on the full moon, you should still follow the lunar cycle for the practices. Some female students have been confused by this process, but if you stay with the moon, your menstrual cycle will gradually begin to change to the correct time.

Practising any of the methods within the Nei Dan process is fine during menstruation providing that it does not exhaust you or cause your bleed to become heavier. If you notice an increase in tiredness from practising Nei Dan while menstruating, then you are causing deficiency of Qi. You should back away from work with either the 'firing process' or the 'wind

path' and instead return to following your breath as outlined in Chapter 4. Your body needs a little time to regulate itself, and following the breath is a gentle practice which will keep your regular practice at its current level without adding to any Qi depletion. Try out your normal process during each sitting session to see if you have the energy to continue because energy levels can vary greatly from day to day. In the same manner, step back from any of the processes outlined in this book if you find that they make your menstrual bleed heavier. If this happens, it means that you have added too much heat to the Uterus which will weaken the strength of your Blood. In this case, go back to following the breath again and wait until your body has a chance to regulate its cycles so that this no longer becomes an issue.

CONCLUSION

A complete, in-depth study of the nature of women's practice of the Daoist arts would take an entire book, if not more. There are many gender-specific nuances that make internal work for women an interesting and unique art form in its own right. I simply wished to put into this book the information relevant to Nei Dan practitioners. Those with enough experience of arts such as Qi Gong and Nei Gong can most likely see how some of this information would fit into their own systems of practice as well. The main differences for Nei Dan lie here with the cycles relating to movement of Jing within the body; any other major differences are outlined in the relevant sections of the book.

Chapter 8

REVERSING THE FIVE ELEMENTS

The next stage of Nei Dan training involves the reversal of the five elements. This is a long and involved stage of Nei Dan training which is certainly moving beyond the foundation aspects of the practice. It is a stage of profound inner cultivation that only those fully dedicated to the Daoist path of transformation will ever attain. Although it is possible with 'casual' practice to touch upon the surface of this level of the process, you will never fully reverse the actions of the five elements without diligence and commitment. In order to understand the nature of alchemical practice and the various attainments to be had from it, we should be realistic with ourselves as to what we are hoping to get from our training. We also need to be realistic as to what we are able to achieve within the confines of our personal life situation.

The stages prior to this chapter, including 'the firing process' and the 'mixing of Kan and Li', are still fairly involved practices which will take some time to achieve. If you feel that you have reached both of these levels in a very short space of time with intermittent training, then I would suggest that you may be mistaken. Reaching the levels discussed so far should take you a fairly long time of maintaining a regular daily practice. If you manage these stages, then you should notice the start of the falling away of the acquired aspects of your mind as well as an improvement in the overall state of your health. Your Xing and Ming should both have been worked with to a large degree and so there should be clear signs of personal benefit. For the majority of people engaging in Daoist Nei Dan, I would say that this is enough. From here, maintain your practice and allow it to nourish the various aspects of your life, which will bring you peace of mind, health and longevity. Anyone wishing to progress past these stages should be aware that it requires periods of retreat away from society, which is very difficult

for a lot of people. To think that the more advanced stages of Nei Dan can be achieved while living a 'regular' life is foolish. All of the teachers and alchemists I have met on this path were very clear about this: advanced Nei Dan training is only for those prepared to enter into seclusion and accept that for periods of time they would be away from normal existence.

WANDER LIKE A CLOUD

As already discussed, the acquired mind develops layers during each and every interaction that we have during the course of our daily life. Every experience is a form of information, an energy that is transferred down through the various layers of mind as we process and distort this information in some way. One concept of Nei Dan is to try to balance out this forming of the acquired mind by working with the various facets of consciousness. In this manner we become more aware of the nature of the acquired mind, which enables us to contact the deeper realms of true consciousness. Advanced stages such as the 'reversal of the five elements' are an attempt to fully silence the acquired mind for periods of time in order to allow true consciousness to shine through for us. This will then begin to transform the manner in which we perceive existence and, we hope, lead towards some kind of inner transcendence. Advanced stages such as this require that we take ourselves away from the world for periods of time so that we can avoid as many of the things that contribute to the forming of the acquired mind as possible. Although we will never be fully free from its formation, we can try to minimize the amount of emotionally charged distraction that otherwise pulls us from our inner journey.

Daoism was never a monastic tradition. The concept of Daoist monks and priests came much later to Daoism. The teachings of the shamanic Wu people and the writings of Laozi and Zhuangzi were never designed to be interpreted within the hierarchy of a religious community. Originally known as a 'folk tradition', Daoism was based around a mix of periods within society and periods of self-imposed seclusion. The idea was that Daoists 'wandered like a cloud' for periods of time and I was taught that travelling with no fixed abode was an important part of the Daoist journey. This was the perfect balance for the Xin to learn about the world before processing those concepts and shedding the layers during seclusion. The nature of the Xin is to be studied with regard to how we allow our Xing to form from within it. From here we can see that several key themes appear.

First, there is a period of time with no fixed root. This lack of root enables a person to understand who they are without the distortion of learned behavioural patterns coming from fixed environmental factors. Too many people believe that they have developed totally as an individual in this life without being influenced by factors beyond their control. This is simply not the case because, to a great extent, people's views are formed from the socio-economic, national and cultural location where they were born and grew up. People around the world will strongly insist that their country's or religion's view is the correct one, when, in fact, if they had been born in a different location and society, they would argue exactly the same from that position instead. If we stay fixed within one location for the whole of our life, this has a strong effect upon our Xin, which then exerts a strong influence upon our Xing. While there is nothing wrong with this – it is natural that we should need to adapt to our personal surroundings – in ancient China it was deemed more useful for a full-time Daoist practitioner to free themselves from this issue for at least a period of time while they allowed their Xing to adapt to different surroundings. Different circumstances produce very different people and an important aspect of searching for the Dao while 'wandering like a cloud' was to try to 'forget yourself', which meant to try to see how your true consciousness could adapt to each location and experience that you had along the journey you were undertaking.

The second important aspect of this kind of tradition is that individuals spent periods of time away from the 'noise' of society so that they could process who they really were with as little as possible in the way of outside distractions. Classically, these periods of seclusion were carried out up in the mountains, partly because of the rising Qi which is useful for alchemical training, but also because up in the mountains it was quiet. Getting away from many influences like this is a powerful way to begin dissolving the layers of acquired mind as many of these layers are only formed in the first place to enable you to communicate effectively with others. From an early age you learn to defend your own inner sensibilities by projecting yourself through the protective layers of acquired mind. When there is nobody to communicate with but yourself, many of these layers naturally begin to fall away. If you have never tried a period of time like this and you get the chance to do so, then I can highly recommend it. The first time I entered into self-imposed seclusion was only for a short period of four weeks. It was very difficult indeed. The strain on my mental state was far harder than I had thought it would be because the acquired mind wrestled

with the process of starting to break down. Emotions surfaced and released themselves in an uncontrollable way as the seclusion started to takes its effect on me. This was quite a different experience from going into a retreat in a monastery or somewhere similar. This is not really seclusion; even if you are in complete silence, you still have tools for the acquired mind to attach itself to. For those who are sincerely dedicated to the Daoist path, I believe that complete seclusion is far superior to going into a monastery designed for meditation retreats, provided, of course, that you have already had instruction on a system to follow.

A third factor in this kind of training is that a practitioner should learn how to stabilize the results gleaned from these periods of seclusion and then learn how to carry these back with themselves into outside society. There is no point in being able to live constantly within a state of true consciousness if the second somebody cuts in front of you in a bus queue you lose it completely and the acquired mind surfaces to make you feel angry. It is always said that the most difficult art of spiritual elevation is keeping it once you are back in the outside world and I totally agree. In many ways the path of 'in and out of retreat' is more difficult than the monastic path of always living in a spiritual community.

The reason I discuss these elements of the Daoist path here is that I am trying to be completely honest. There is a tendency in the West for authors and teachers to take spiritual practices from the East and present them in a way that suggests anybody can reach high levels without really making much of a commitment. I find this tendency somewhat patronizing as well as very misleading. If it took people from past generations lifetimes of dedicated training high up in the mountains of Asia, why do so many modern Westerners seem to think they have reached similar states through following the same practice for an hour a day for just a few years? Alchemy is a long and difficult aspect of the Daoist tradition. Anybody approaching these arts should understand this and realize that they will only manage to attain the level corresponding to the amount of commitment they put in.

ENTERING RETREAT

For those who do wish to take that next step and really dive deep into Nei Dan, however, there are various ways in which you can enter retreat. A retreat does not need you to fly all the way around the world to go to China and climb a mountain. A retreat can be carried out in your home country just as easily. I have students who take a tent up into the hills near

where they live in the UK with just food and a camping stove. In this way they can escape society for several weeks at a time if they wish. There are also various lessons to be had from living out with nature away from home comforts, providing you have a healthy enough constitution to do so. I live in a forest for several months each year and spend the majority of my winters in retreat as well. These periods of time are for me to focus solely upon the type of cultivation and training that can only be carried out away from society. In recent years I have started to attract more and more people who wish to put the same level of dedication into their arts, and now there tends to be a group of us for some of these retreat periods.

Those who do not have the constitution for outdoors living may also opt to enter retreat away from their normal life by using a quiet hotel. Though far from being as good as going fully out into the wilderness, a hotel retreat can be useful. It is something I often find myself doing now that my teaching schedule leads to me travelling so much. The advantage of this is that you can stay in your room and practise alchemy with no disturbances and only go down to eat dinner quietly in the hotel restaurant. The rest of the day is yours, providing that you do not access the internet, turn on the television or go into any local towns. Many countries these days have so many cheap hotels that it is not that expensive a way to train something like Nei Dan. The bottom line is that for those who have the resources and the desire to fully immerse themselves into Nei Dan training, there are ways to do so. I have travelled extensively through Asia for many years and completed periods of retreat there, but these were no better for my training than the retreats I carried out in Europe.

Something to be careful of is becoming so detached from society that you can no longer socialize with people. This is an easy trap to fall into and something that I have seen time and time again. Partially through my own personal practice and also because of my natural way of being, I am always slightly uncomfortable with social gatherings. I am bad at small talk and not much interested in socializing simply for the sake of it. Despite this, I recognize that other people often are, and it is also important for my own personal growth that I continue to mix with people even if I am not overly enamoured with it. This is something all practitioners of the internal arts should be aware of. After you have reached a certain point in your practice, it becomes the norm that you also begin to dislike parties and social functions. But you must continue to be involved in them. It is a great test of the state of your Xing that you are able to mix with people and project inner stillness and good humour. Within your centre you should

learn to maintain whatever state you can reach through your sitting practice and not allow it to be disturbed by the interactions you are having. As your level of perception increases, you will naturally begin to discern many of the motivations behind the things people say to each other when they socialize. It is often this level of perception that begins to make social gatherings a difficult experience, but they should nevertheless become a part of your practice. I have met too many practitioners and teachers of the internal arts who have used their inability to socialize as a sign of their internal development. They have fallen into the trap of presenting their social dysfunction as a kind of 'trophy' which they use to try to impress their students and peers. Do not fall into this trap; an inability to maintain your inner state while mixing with others is also a weakness in your practice that must be overcome. This has always been the Daoist way; it is one of the key skills to be learned from 'wandering like a cloud' between periods of isolation and living within society. Always seek balance in every aspect of your life.

THE ALCHEMICAL WU XING

The Wu Xing or 'five elemental processes' are one of the most important theoretical frameworks to have come out of Daoism. The model has been integrated into Qi Gong, cosmology, Chinese medicine and countless other aspects of the tradition. This is partly because, as well as being incredibly simple, it is also profoundly accurate in its ability to provide understanding of the manner in which various phenomena interrelate with each other. Everything in existence can be classified according to the Wu Xing, including various aspects of the spirit within Nei Dan training. Table 8.1 summarizes many aspects of the internal arts and related subjects when categorized according to the Wu Xing.

Some of the correspondences in Table 8.1 are relevant to Nei Dan, in particular the manner in which they both generate and relate to each other. According to the theory of Wu Xing, there are several ways in which each key element relates to the rest of the cycle. These key correspondences are known as the 'generating cycle', the 'governing cycle' and the 'reverse cycle'. These three cycles are the most important way in which the elements work as a holistic unit. The three cycles are shown in Figure 8.1.

Table 8.1: The Wu Xing Correspondences

Phenomenon	Wood	Fire	Earth	Metal	Water
Colour	Green	Red	Yellow	White	Blue
Direction	East	South	Centre	West	North
Spirit	Hun	Shen	Yi	Po	Zhi
Movement	Rising	Expanding	Dividing	Contracting	Sinking
Emotion	Anger	Excitation	Worry	Sadness	Fear
Season	Spring	Summer	Change	Autumn	Winter
Climate	Wind	Heat	Damp	Dryness	Cold
Power	Growth	Maturity	Change	Decline	Demise
Planet	Jupiter	Mars	Saturn	Venus	Mercury
Animal	Dragon	Phoenix	Bird	Tiger	Turtle
De	Patience	Contentment	Compassion	Bravery	Wisdom
Substance	Qi	Shen	Yuan Shen	Yuan Xi	Jing
Sound	Shouting	Laughing	Singing	Crying	Moaning
Taste	Sour	Bitter	Sweet	Pungent	Salty
Smell	Rancid	Burnt	Fragrant	Rotten	Putrid
Alchemical	Mercury	Cinnabar	Gold	Silver	Lead
Yin Organ	Liver	Heart	Spleen	Lungs	Kidneys
Yang Organ	Gall Bladder	Small Intestine	Stomach	Large Intestine	Bladder
Psyche	Planning	Dreaming	Intellect	Logic	Will
Tissues	Tendons	Blood Vessels	Muscles	Skin	Bones
Orifice	Eyes	Tongue	Mouth	Nose	Ears
Age	Child	Teenager	Adult	Old Age	Elderly

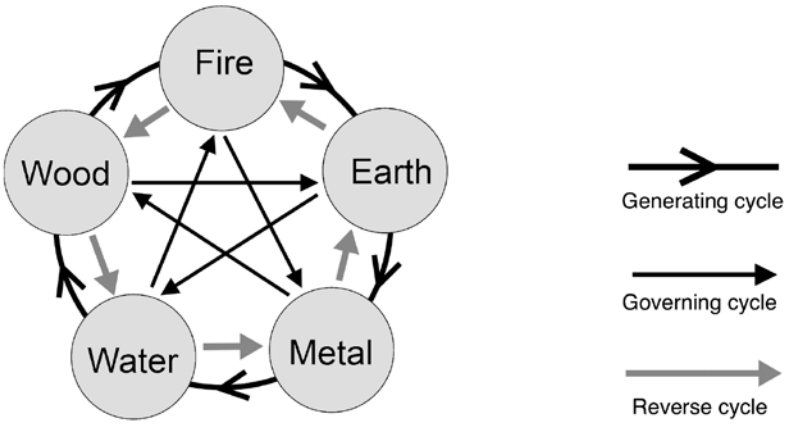


Figure 8.1: The Wu Xing Cycles

The 'generating cycle' shows the process by which each element gives birth to and nourishes the one that comes after it. It is this cycle that is matched by all manifested phenomena within the universe during the process of their creation. The 'governing cycle' shows how each element keeps another in check and at the same time is governed by another. This cycle ensures that a certain level of harmony is held in place within the manifested world. The 'reverse cycle' is the most important for Nei Dan practitioners as this is the cycle we require in order to return to the source of Dao. By utilizing the 'reverse cycle' of the Wu Xing, we can return through the natural process of creation in order to shift from the acquired to the congenital. The theory of the Wu Xing is one of the most discussed models in the Daoist world, so I will not introduce it in any more detail here. If you reach this aspect of the practice and do not feel that you have an adequate understanding of the theory of Wu Xing, then you should refer to any good Chinese medicine book or my previous title *Heavenly Streams: Meridian Theory in Nei Gong* in order to gain a better understanding. What I will focus on here are the aspects of Wu Xing relevant to Nei Dan training rather than the Chinese medical standpoint it is usually discussed from.

THE WU XING IN NEI DAN

The Wu Xing are generally discussed according to the key animals and the compass directions with which they are associated. Earth is considered to be at the centre of the four compass directions and so it is generally taken out of the cycle many readers will be familiar with. This gives us

the new 'generating cycle' shown in Figure 8.2. This is the cycle used in alchemical texts.

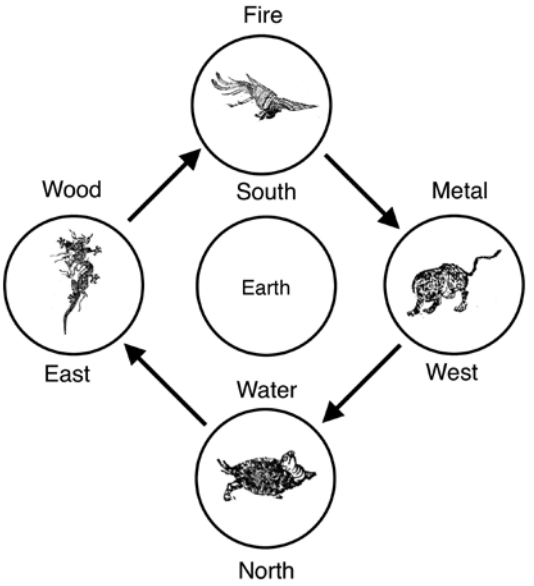


Figure 8.2: The Nei Dan Generating Cycle

Note that this cycle is considerably different from the cycle used in Chinese medicine. Fire now gives birth to Metal, while Earth sits at the middle of the chart. Earth is considered to act upon each point of change between any of the other four elements. Also note that the directions are different from how you would expect them to appear from a Western viewpoint. North is placed at the bottom of the chart and South is at the top. This is because of the ancient Daoist medical view of the body. The fetus was understood to be upside down inside the mother's womb and so the congenital placement of North and South was reversed in ancient medical texts. This is why you will find the lower abdomen, the Kidneys and the lower Dan Tien associated with the direction of North, while the Heart, middle Dan Tien, chest and head are associated with South. This makes the compass directions of the human body as shown in Figure 8.3.

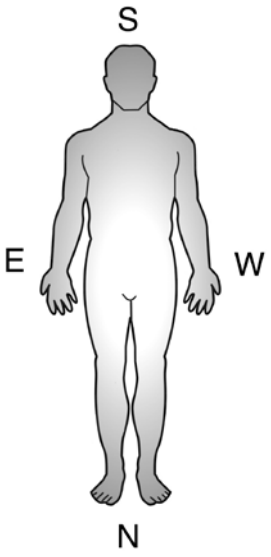


Figure 8.3: The Human Body Compass Directions

Note also that the animals appear in place of the five elements, so we have the red phoenix representing Fire, the white tiger representing Metal, the black turtle representing Water and the green dragon representing Wood. The animals are chosen in place of the elements as these were considered the key constellations of the ancient Chinese sky. According to alchemical theory, the microcosm of the human body is dependent on the macrocosmic forces of the Heavens, including the shifting of the stars. This meant that the four animal divisions of the night sky were directly responsible for the shifting of the Wu Xing within the human body.

Each of the animals/elements also represents one of the key aspects of human spirit – the Shen, Po, Zhi, Hun and Yi. These five make up the human Xin, which in turn generates the state of our Xing as discussed in Chapter 5. Within the Nei Dan 'generating cycle' the most important relationships are the relationships of Fire generating Metal and Water generating Wood. This means that Shen generates Po while Zhi generates Hun. These generating relationships are shown in Figure 8.4.

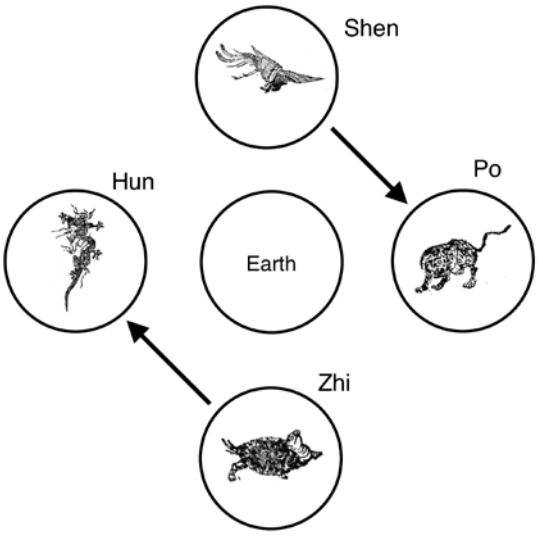


Figure 8.4: The Key Generating Relationships

What this means with regard to human consciousness is that the divine relationship we have to Heaven and Dao is always generating the actions of the Yin aspect of our soul, the Po. The Po is the aspect of the human mind that connects us to the tangible world. It gives us a sense of connection to that with which we are able to connect through the lens of the five senses as well as logic and reasoning. The seven divisions of Po are each linked to one of our key attachments and desires which eat away at us over the course of our life, leading to our obsession with the tangible and transient. Table 8.2 shows each of the seven aspects of Po according to their name and the relevant aspect of attachment and desire with which they correspond.

Table 8.2: The Attachments of the Seven Po

Po Spirit	**Attachments**
Corpse Dog	Attachment to pleasure
Kidnapping Corpse	Attachment to anger/resentment
Dark Bird	Attachment to worries and fears
Greedy Robber	Attachment to sadness and loss
Flying Poison	Attachment to likes and dislikes
Great Poison	Attachment to objects and ownership
Rotten Lung	Attachment to sexual desires

This model of the movement from the Shen into the Po shows how the divine information from Heaven is distorted by our Earthly attachments. Our attachment to a higher place is lost through the petty desires that our acquired mind has formed through the actions of the Po.

With regard to the Zhi generating the Hun, what we see is our 'will power', which relies on the strength of the Zhi, being lost in the dreamy movements of the Hun. The Hun is often discussed metaphorically as being like the wind and clouds. It floats around with little rooting, resulting in day dreams and an inability to stay rooted within the physical realm. The Zhi is also our connection to Ming as well as the will of Heaven. This places our sense of higher purpose as well as the nature of our life path within the realms of Zhi. If the Zhi is always feeding the dream-like actions of the Hun, then none of the directing forces of our will, our Ming or the will of Heaven can ever be realized.

If we look at two of these relationships, we can see that the Shen giving birth to Po is a manifestation of Yang being lost in Yin, and the Zhi generating the Hun is Yin being lost in Yang.

The final aspect of this natural cycle is the positioning of Fire on top and Water on the bottom. The natural tendency is for Fire to flare upwards through the actions of excessive emotional movements, whereas water sinks downwards as a result of the loss of essence through desires. This division of Fire and Water brings about our destruction as they both contribute to the decline of our health and a speeding up of the ageing process.

At the centre of all this is the Earthly Yi which processes all of the actions of the rest of the elements to give us our intellect and thought processes. Depending upon the Yi's relationship to the state of the other elements, it will generate various distortions which contribute to the forming of our Xing. This entire model then becomes another way of looking at the formation of acquired mind from true consciousness as we have discussed previously.

REVERSING THE WU XING CYCLE

Although this is the natural state of affairs within the manifested world of the human microcosm, we are aiming to reverse this process. By reversing the process of the Wu Xing, we can begin to change the way in which the spirits relate to each other. This then brings us closer to realizing the potential of true consciousness.

The first aspect of the reversal of the Wu Xing is the reversal of the actions of the Po and the Hun. When this happens, the Po begins to come under the control of the Shen rather than being fed by it. In the same way, the Hun comes under the control of the Zhi. This is considered to be the stilling of the acquired mind. This takes place during successful state of Zuo Wang, as discussed in Chapter 6. When the Po comes under the control of the Shen, the various attachments and desires of the Yin soul stop taking away from our connection to the divine. The acquired mind begins to still and we experience a sense of calm and stillness as our mind empties. At the same time, our dreamy Hun comes under the control of our Zhi, meaning that we experience an increased sense of will power and determination. It is this combination of will and stillness that is the hallmark of somebody who has successfully managed to enter into the state of Zuo Wang.

From this state, the elements of Water and Fire or Kan and Li begin to reverse, as discussed in Chapter 6. All the signs already discussed begin to manifest within the microcosm of your body and then the two key elements of Fire and Water begin to reverse, resulting in a switch of positions in the Wu Xing chart as shown in Figure 8.5.

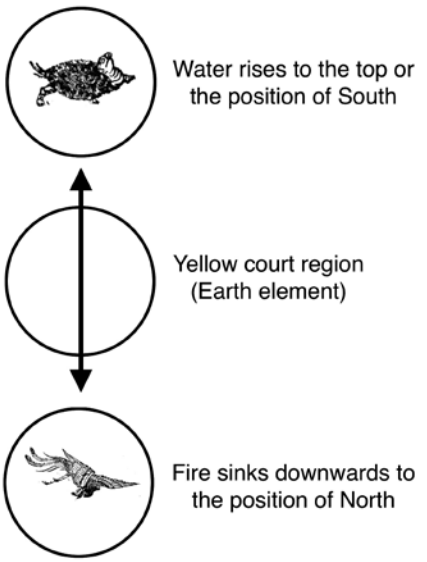


Figure 8.5: The Switching of Fire and Water in the Wu Xing

This is the diagrammatic representation of the states of Zuo Wang and the 'mixing of Kan and Li'. They are stages of attainment that contribute to the full reversal of the Wu Xing. This is why I stated previously that entering

Zuo Wang takes time and is something that you cannot be expected to achieve straight away. Elementally, Zuo Wang means the returning of the Po to the Shen and the Hun to the Zhi, which is a major shift within the states of your five spirits. This takes diligent practice. Attaining this state and successfully entering true Zuo Wang is quite an achievement.

The return of the Hun and Po to the control of the Zhi and Shen takes place during periods of stillness when you are sitting in Nei Dan practice. Once you end this period of stillness, you return from the 'reverse cycle' to the 'generating cycle' because outside of Zuo Wang you will still be generating thoughts; otherwise, you would not be able to function on a daily basis. Thoughts are actions of the Yi which rely on the movements of the acquired mind and Xing, so the 'generating cycle' is a necessary cycle of the Wu Xing. This results in a new version of the Wu Xing chart, shown in Figure 8.6. This new cycle takes place after successful reversal of Fire and Water.

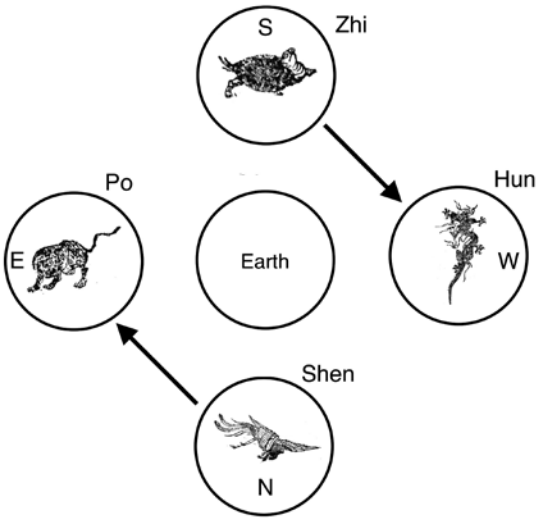


Figure 8.6: The Final Generating Cycle

Now the Shen generates the Po which sits at the direction of East, while the Zhi generates the Hun which resides at the direction of West. Diagrammatically, the four key directions have all been reversed, meaning that a shift has taken place within the various actions of your mind. This reversal of directions results in the 'reversal of Fire and Water' and the attainment of two important states discussed in alchemical scripture: 'the movement of the white tiger to the East' and the 'shifting of the green

dragon to the West'. Variations on these two terms appear in different texts, but the animals are always said to require moving from their natural directions to the reverse. Now each of the elements has been reversed. This results in the recombining of the five elements as shown in Figure 8.7.

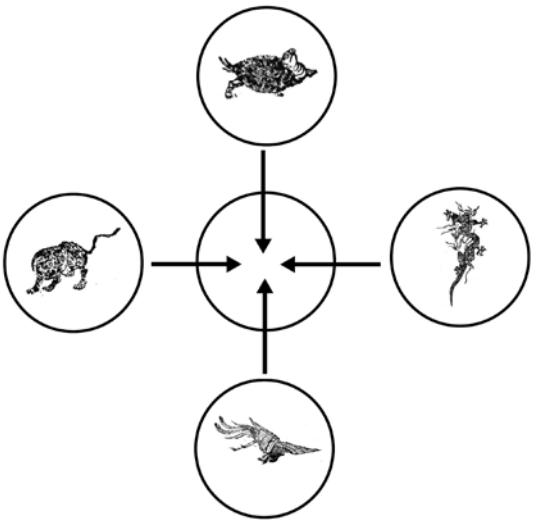


Figure 8.7: Combining the Wu Xing

All five elements return to reconnect with each other. This is a full reversal of the refraction of the five aspects of acquired spirit from Yuan Shen during the process of our creation. This is the doorway to the opening of the Xuan Men (玄門), the 'mysterious pass' of Daoism, a gateway into the realm of Wuji. This is a most profound state of attainment to reach and a clear milestone in your alchemical practice.

It is always important to me that each stage of progress comes with a clear sign that is difficult to miss. This removes the risk of self-delusion, which is the biggest difficulty faced by any practitioner of the internal arts. At each and every step of our development we must always stop and be realistic with ourselves. Is there any risk that we have been deluding ourselves in any way? Has our imagination got in the way, which is a clear trick of the acquired mind? One way we prevent this is to look for clear signs of progress based on physiological and psychological changes that take place at each step along the way. At this level, when the elements begin to reverse and the Hun and Po change their interactions, they begin to relate differently to one another. According to Daoist thought, the Hun and the Po are most closely related to each other when we go to sleep.

Our dreams are considered to be the interactions of the Hun and Po as they download for us all of the Heavenly and Earthly experiences we have had during the course of our waking life. If the Hun is dominant, then we usually experience dreams that are very abstract and visually exciting. If the Po is dominant, then we experience dreams that are mundane and generally quite boring. For example, a dream of flying through space accompanied by a team of mythological beasts would be a Hun dream, whereas going to the local shops would be a Po dream. All of us experience these dreams each night, whether we remember them clearly or not, until we reach the stage of the reversal of the Metal and Wood elements. At this stage the Hun and Po interact differently with each other and your dreams stop. Now, instead of entering the dream state when you go to sleep, you enter the Zuo Wang state. As you fall asleep, you become aware of falling into a great abyss and then you enter into a state of mental stillness which continues while you sleep. Sleep in this state becomes very deep and revitalizing; you will never feel unrested when you awake in the morning. This realm of stillness becomes your natural sleeping state unless you need to know something from within the Heavenly realm of your consciousness. In this case, you will be given a short but very clear dream of something that you need to know. These dreams may be of future occurrences or the direction you should take that will change the path of your Ming in some way. In my case, I am a practitioner of Chinese medicine so it is common for me to have a dream of a person I am soon going to be treating. My main modality is acupuncture, so I will normally see the patient's body with a small red hole in it corresponding to an acupuncture point that I must needle. When I follow the guidance from these dreams, I always have the strongest effects upon my patient's health. These are accompanied by clear dreams directing my Ming; again, if I follow these, I find that my life takes the best path for my personal growth. On nights when there is nothing to be learned, I instead enter the state of Zuo Wang. It is also interesting to note that if, for whatever reason, I am out of balance, the normal Hun and Po dreams return. I travel a great deal and, no matter what precautions you take, an occasional bout of food poisoning is almost inevitable. When I become sick, this is when I have the regular dreams back and then I always note that the next day I am nowhere near as rested. My productivity is lowered, together with the level of my training and my general mental faculties.

ENTERING WUJI

When the five elements begin to come together, you will begin to enter the state of Wuji. This is a state of deep inner stillness which many practitioners of meditation will no doubt have experienced before. The Wuji state strangely often appears to absolute beginners and they get a brief glimpse of this level of attainment, although they then usually find it very difficult to return to. Wuji is stabilized after the reversal of the Wu Xing so that you enter this state after a short while in pretty much every sitting session of Nei Dan practice. It is this state that is required to approach the more advanced levels of Nei Dan training and it is unlikely to be reached by those who are only casually practising alchemy. Although you may have brief or infrequent experiences of Wuji, you will not manage to make it a constant state that is easy to enter into.

When you attain the state of Wuji, the five elements have converged, meaning that the spirits have come back together. This then stills the acquired mind and elevates your awareness to a sufficiently high 'frequency' that you are no longer in touch with the physical world. The distance of your personal perception of the world you are living in from its normal state is so great that the world literally begins to break down for you. As a result you enter into a deep state where your body begins to fade away. In my own experience, as well as that of my students and peers, this state actually manifests gradually as shown in Figure 8.8, although no writings discuss these gradual phases and no teacher I had gave oral descriptions of these stages.

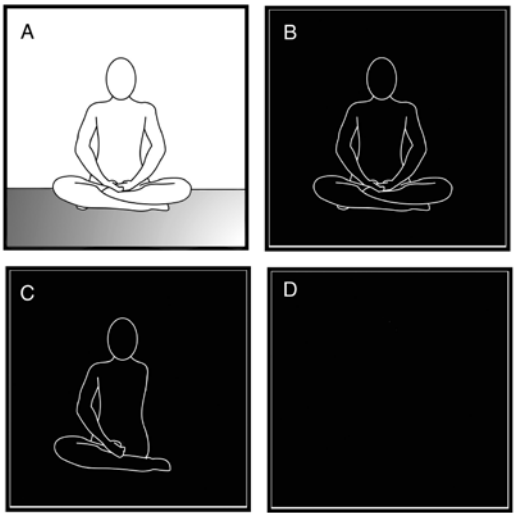


Figure 8.8: The Stages of Entering Wuji

Image A shows the normal state of Nei Dan sitting practice prior to entering Wuji. Even if a sense of inner stillness has been achieved, the practitioner is still aware of the location of their body and the floor. Aches and pains can still be felt, and if the practitioner wishes, they may bring their awareness to any part of their body. Image B shows the normal next step that can actually be attained through entering Zuo Wang. Here the practitioner tends to lose all sense of their surroundings, meaning that they can no longer feel the floor against their legs and lower body. All natural sense of direction vanishes, together with a sense of up and down. The mind is much quieter and it is difficult actually to listen to any noise from outside at this time. It is normal for all sense of time to vanish as well, meaning that a two-hour sitting session can often seem to last 20 minutes or less. Despite the loss of surroundings, you are generally still aware of your body, which can become obvious to you if any cramping of the muscles appears. Image C shows the odd stage of beginning to enter Wuji. At this stage it seems as though parts of your body are beginning to vanish. Note that this is different from parts of your body going numb; it is more as if they are not there. If you go to move a particular limb, you will find it nearly impossible because your mind simply cannot connect with it. It is an odd sensation which you will know if you experience it. You should never worry about this, though, as opening your eyes brings you right back to your normal state and your limbs 'reappear'. Image D shows the next stage in which the whole of your body vanishes from your perception. This is fully entering into Wuji.

When you fully enter into Wuji, it becomes impossible to feel your body in any way at all. You have also lost all sense of direction, up and down, time and scale. Your surroundings have faded away and you are fully entered into 'the void'. Your awareness has heightened to such an extent that you are now completely tuned out of both the physical and the energetic realms. This is the realm of pure potential sitting at the core of your being. It is possible to touch upon this level briefly during other practices such as Qi Gong and Nei Gong, but until you move deep into Nei Dan training it will never fully stabilize to the extent that entering this state becomes fairly easy. This state also sits at the centre of the Chong Mai, meaning that some practices involving direct work with the congenital meridians can also on occasion give you an experience of this state.

When you begin to enter into Wuji for the first few times, simply stay with it and allow your body to become used to it. Your acquired mind will have grown very still and any sudden thoughts will bring you back out of

Wuji, so simply try to remain still and observe what is taking place. There will be no pain in the body at all, no emotional disturbances and no sense of time, so be aware that this state can become very addictive. It is at this level that so many practitioners of meditation become hooked and vanish off into the mountains to focus solely on their practice.

At the stage of Wuji there are no particular methods to employ, except for waiting and observing until you are ready to move on. Just breathe naturally and sit and observe what is taking place. There are various experiences to be had at this level as the mind begins a rapid evolution into an altered state which will pave the way for the appearance of the first alchemical agent.

Living in the Present Moment

Although in Wuji there are several stages of change that your mind begins to go through, these can result in various experiences; the first of these is what I call 'mental discarding'. When this takes place, a sudden rush of imagery may move past your vision within the darkness. You will perceive countless short moving scenes rushing past your vision as your whole life unfolds from within your memory. This is akin to when people say that they were near death and their whole life rushed before their eyes. This is the sign that the mind is discarding emotional attachments to memories that it considers a hindrance to its evolution. Although the memories will still be there, they will have weaker energetic cords binding them into the layers of your acquired mind. This is very liberating as past events begin to stop having a negative impact on your current life. It is like a highly accelerated version of the emotional releases that many people experience through deep practice of arts such as Qi Gong, Nei Gong or Yoga.

This attachment to past memories begins to change the way in which you connect to the various stages of time within your daily life. If we separate your daily life into three aspects – the past, the present and the future – we have a model for the way in which your acquired mind both anchors and projects itself. Figure 8.9 shows this process in summary.

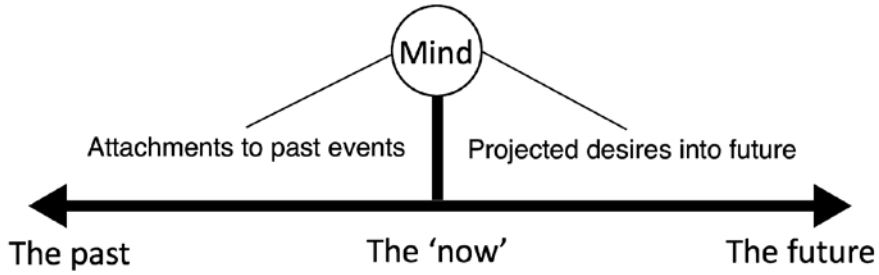


Figure 8.9: Past, Present and Future

The key factors behind the mind's perception of the past and future are two of the biggest aspects of acquired mind – 'attachments' and 'desires'. Attachments are the anchors that your acquired mind forges with past events, whereas desires are generally imagined projections out into the future. The 'glue' with which the bonds of attachments and desires are formed is your emotions, which is why it is impossible to recall any event from your past or imagine any future outcome without there being some kind of emotional content to that thought. This emotionally charged content then builds upon the layers of the acquired mind, burying our true consciousness deeper beneath the surface. In this way, our desires and attachments are preventing us from realizing our inner potential.

New-age writers have coined the term 'living in the present moment' as essentially a state of being devoid of attachments to the past or desires based around the future. They advise people to simply 'live in the present moment', which has become a great catchphrase but is essentially pretty much impossible. Simply being aware of wanting to 'live in the present moment' will not make it happen unless a change takes place in the core of your being, and this change generally takes place within the stillness of Wuji. As the 'mental discarding' begins to take place, it is normal for your attachments and desires to begin to become less dominant within your thought patterns. If we wish to understand this occurrence through the model of the Wu Xing, it is the conversion of the seven aspects of Po that is helping to change your attachments, and the adjustment of the Hun that is helping to change your future desires. Learning to 'live in the present moment' is a spontaneously arising mindset which is a result of entering into deep internal states. The positive of this is that it helps to still the emotional centre of the Heart and bring about a greater sense of harmony, but the negative is that you tend to find it difficult to plan a long way into the future and you have to consciously think in order to recall

a memory from your past. Whereas in the past you automatically recalled relevant information from within your memory, now you have to make an effort to recall something. The memory is still there; it is just not so intimately connected to your present moment. This is why so many skilled practitioners of meditation may have very sharp minds and be very happy but tend to be pretty disorganized, forgetful and a little eccentric. This has always been a constant state of being in all skilled practitioners I have met, no matter what system they practised.

It is common for the light of Shen Ming to appear during the Wuji state as well. When Shen Ming appears, it will actually bring you slightly out of your Wuji state, so work with it in the same way as before by rooting it in the correct Dan Tien before going back into Wuji. Every time you go through this process you are solidifying your foundation work within the energetic realm.

Past Lives

Within the realm of Wuji it is normal to touch upon past lives that your Hun has been through. The Hun is the immortal aspect of your soul which travels from life to life through the process of transmigration. Lessons learned from previous incarnations manifest within this life, and only when you touch upon your previous lives do you begin to gain an insight into many aspects of your current state. When you touch upon a past life, you will generally begin to see a 'play back' of some of that life's key events which will feel clearly as if they are your memories rather than just random images you are perceiving. That being said, I tend to treat past lives with an air of irrelevance. Part of the reason for this is that I see too many people hung up on them. If you had a past life that somebody would perceive as important, then it fuels the egoistic layers of acquired mind, while painful experiences from past lives begin to haunt practitioners. I have met too many people who sought for answers to all their current life's woes by exploring their past lives, and, in my opinion, they are generally over-complicating things. While the nature of transmigration is interesting, we all have the potential for transcendence within our current life. In addition to individual past lives, there are also past lives which can be perceived when we touch upon the great collective centre of Wuji. This means that we may well be perceiving a previous incarnation that does not directly relate to our own life, and several practitioners may touch upon this same life as

they also enter into the collective. For these reasons, enjoy the nature of your experiences but do not dwell upon them or give them any importance.

Embryonic Breathing

When we go deep enough into Wuji, it is normal for us to begin embryonic breathing, which is an energetic replacement for the respiratory function of our lungs. Many have discussed embryonic breathing and stated that it is when your breathing becomes very quiet and shallow. At this stage it is almost impossible to perceive. I tend to disagree. Quiet breathing is quiet breathing. Embryonic breathing goes much deeper than this because it is when you completely stop breathing. A common phrase for this kind of breathing is 'becoming like a dead man'. When this happens, your heart stops beating and your breathing stops altogether. Your body enters stasis and your energetic field moves with a far stronger force to it. Inhalation is replaced by a strong contraction of the energetic field, while exhalation becomes a powerful expansion of the energetic field. At this stage your entire body functioning changes. When you experience it for the first time, you actually realize after a few minutes that you are not breathing any more and a sense of panic sets in. It is normal to break your practice abruptly as you take a sudden (unrequired) gasp of air. After the first few times of this happening you know what it is and the body normalizes it. Now it can happen without you breaking your practice and last for some time. During this state you will experience profound healing benefits as you are existing within a purely congenital state.

I have heard of therapists who are so good at what they do that they sometimes take their patients into this state, but I have not seen this myself. For me, embryonic breathing is a natural by-product of spending long periods in the Wuji state and only occurs during prolonged retreats when the circumstances are perfect. These experiences only last for short times, but I was informed by a teacher that embryonic breathing is the foundation skill for entering into long periods of complete stasis. There are many stories of Daoist masters entering into these states of 'being like dead men' for years on end, although I have not seen this myself.

The Contraction of Wuji

A common experience to be aware of is a contraction of Wuji. When this happens, you will enter into the Wuji state as before but this time it

will feel as though there are distinct borders to the space you are sitting within. Although your body vanishes, your mind feels as though you are sitting inside a very small box, much like sitting in a coffin. It is a very claustrophobic sensation which is considered an error in your practice. I have had it happen to me several times in my life and it should be averted. The contraction of Wuji occurs when your mind is in the right state but your body is imbalanced for whatever reason. It is considered a result of an imbalance between your Xing and Ming. The health of your body relies upon the state of your Ming; if this foundation is not good enough, then it can cause you to deviate from the correct path. In my case, I was working too hard and so had a deficiency of Jing and Qi. As soon as I took the time to rest and heal myself with good food and enough sleep, the issue went away and expansion returned to my Wuji state.

The Expansion of Wuji

In order to progress further into Nei Dan, you should remain in Wuji until you begin to reach the level of full stabilization of the state. This means that you reach a state whereby your mind and body can fully normalize existing within the realm of emptiness. You will know when you have attained this stage as you will enter into Wuji within a very short space of time after beginning your Nei Dan sitting sessions. The stillness will have begun to permeate through your body, meaning that the functioning of your whole energetic system will most likely have changed. You are literally sitting within the congenital realm, and the longer you can do this, the deeper into a congenital way of functioning you will enter. The easiest way to spot this is that your body will have become very soft all over. Your tissues will have relaxed to the point that your skin almost seems to slide over your muscles and bones when you move it. Adhesion of the layers of fascia will have released so that your whole body has a soft texture much like that of a baby's body. Your joints will also have softened up, giving you a high degree of flexibility and fluidity when you move. A person who has truly reached this stage can look almost boneless when they move as the nourishing effects of Wuji change the manner in which their body is structured. If you are stiff in the joints and have a high degree of muscular tightness, then you have not yet stabilized Wuji to the point of moving on in your practice. It always impresses me when I meet high-level meditation practitioners how fluidly they move and how soft their bodies are. In addition, a sense of mental

stillness should be the norm and strong emotional shifts should be a thing of the past. A sense of contentment should be your natural state of being.

When you feel ready to progress, you should begin to expand your awareness gently out in every direction. You should progress slowly as you need to find the perfect balance between gentle action of the mind and staying in stillness. Every couple of minutes you should expand your mind outwards about an inch in every direction. This will result in a spherical expansion as shown in Figure 8.10.



Figure 8.10: Spherical Expansion in Wuji

If you move too quickly or use too strong an intention, you will find you leave Wuji immediately. It is often the case that you will not be able to regain the Wuji state easily and so you will have to try this stage again in your next sitting session, but occasionally you may be lucky and return to Wuji so you can try again. Progress slowly and steadily until you expand your awareness out from the body for a distance of several feet. It will be very difficult to be exact with this practice, though, as you have no physical means by which to measure your location. You will know when you hit the correct distance from the body because you will feel a gentle pull of energy coming from somewhere within your body out to the 'bubble' you have created around yourself. This movement of energy is the expansion of Wuji reacting with your energetic body. In meditation texts it is sometimes described as being like the wind blowing from behind your ears, and I can understand why. The sensation of the movement of energy within the stillness feels as if a gentle breeze is moving within the space you are sitting in. When you reach this state, stop the expansion because it will now continue on its own. You

may find that you have to attain this state several times and then, from that point on, when you enter Wuji you will find that the expansion happens on its own. Please note that this expansion should be carried out very slowly. I had two teachers who discussed this stage of expanding but they neglected to highlight to me the importance of progressing very steadily with this exercise. Consequently, I rushed into it with my usual clumsiness and got nowhere. It took me a lot of trial and error to find out how slowly I had to expand the awareness in order to get the results I was after.

CONVERSION OF THE DE

Reaching the stages of stabilizing Wuji within the body so that it begins to have its softening effects and then expanding within this space will no doubt take you several months of steady practice. During this time you will have been spending large amounts of time in a congenital state. Your acquired mind will have begun to react to this and you should have noticed many shifts in your views, emotional states and perceptions of the world. These shifts can even include strange things such as preferences for food. Prior to beginning any internal work, I had no problem with tomatoes, but since the change process starting taking place within my Xin, I can no longer stand raw tomatoes. Even smelling them makes me feel slightly ill. This is quite normal as your body will begin to tell you what is good for it and what is not. While tomatoes are fine for the majority of people, they are clearly not good for my internal environment.

More important than food preferences are the shifts in the acquired mind that begin the transformation of the emotions into the De. The De or 'virtues' are rarely discussed in Daoism, which is shame as they are some of the most important aspects of the whole tradition. The De are the congenital manifestations of the five spirits when they are beginning to operate according to true consciousness rather than acquired mind. Your emotions should begin to become secondary to the De which take over the quality of your Xing. Table 8.3 shows the relationship of the De to the Wu Xing and your emotions.

Every aspect of mind is only a manifestation of energy, a form of information that shines outwards into your Xing. Every teacher seems to have a different take on what the De actually are and how they connect to the Wu Xing and the emotions. I have included here the De that I usually discuss, although essentially it is not that important. Trying to put a label on virtuous aspects of the psyche is always going to be difficult.

Also, trying to break down the entire complexity of human nature into five broad categories is never going to work very well. There are countless facets and possibilities for the way in which the human psychological state can manifest, in the same way that there are countless different emotional states that we can experience. Do not see each emotion or De as a set entity but rather a broad category within which numerous other psychological states can manifest. When the De associated with an element begins to manifest, you are experiencing the Xing aspect of that element being expressed without passing through the distorted lens of the acquired mind. For example, when patience and understanding pass through the distortion of the acquired mind, they are often lost in a mire of anger and separation. Of course, the De are always there and we all have the potential for both negative emotionally charged behaviour as well as virtuous expression, but conversion of Xing will lead to the De becoming your 'default' state, as discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Table 8.3: The De

Element	Emotion	De (Virtue)
Wood	Anger	Patience/Understanding
Fire	Excitation	Contentment
Earth	Worry	Empathy/Compassion
Metal	Sadness	Bravery/Conviction
Water	Fear	Wisdom/Clarity

THE LARGE WATER WHEEL

The conversion of Kan and Li into Qian and Kun essentially generates two separate poles within the energy body which are much closer to Yin and Yang. This is important for beginning to set up the Da Zhou Tian (大周天), which can be translated literally as meaning 'the large Heavenly orbit', although I refer to it by the name of the 'large water wheel' as this was the name verbally taught to me when I was studying this aspect of Nei Gong. The circulation of energy that takes place during the opening of the 'large water wheel' is interesting because essentially any circulation taking place within the channels of the meridian system should really still be considered an acquired aspect of the Daoist transformational process

and yet it takes place after entering the stage of direct congenital work. On top of that, the orbit also moves within channels that are classed as congenital in nature and yet at the same time these channels also transfer acquired substances through your system on a daily basis. Often within Daoism there is this confusion between stages because any work within the congenital realm will have a direct effect on the acquired realm.

When Qian and Kun are created by the 'mixing of Kan and Li', there is the possibility for full extension of the Chong Mai which is pulled out further from the body. It sets up a circulation of the congenital meridians as shown in Figure 8.11.

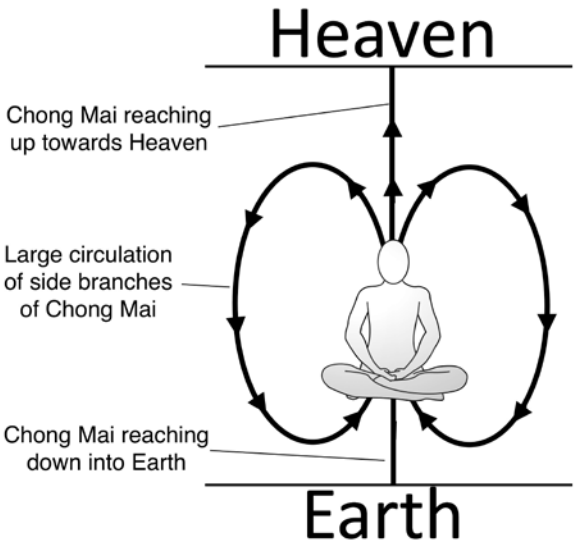

Heaven
Chong Mai reaching up towards Heaven
Large circulation of side branches of Chong Mai
Chong Mai reaching down into Earth
Earth

Figure 8.11: The Large Water Wheel

When this happens, there is a strong sensation of the crown of your head pulling upwards at the same time as your perineum is pulling down into the ground. The most Yang meridian point of Bai Hui (百會) (Du 20) opens upwards towards Heaven, while the most Yin meridian point of Hui Yin (會陰) (Ren 1) opens downwards into the Earth. Corresponding meridian points on the top and bottom of your auric field also open up. I usually just refer to these points as the Heaven and Earth 'linking points'. Over the years I have developed increasingly high degrees of energetic sensitivity and so I can now feel what is taking place when the 'large water wheel' opens up. The extension of the central branch of the Chong Mai pulls open the entire core of your energy body before it spirals out from the Bai Hui and Hui

Yin meridian points out to the 'linking points' at the edges of your auric field. This then begins to move the ends of your Chong Mai out beyond the limits of your auric field to connect upwards into pure Yang and down into pure Yin. In addition, the Chong Mai has two side branches which run through the torso parallel with the Chong Mai's central branch. These two branches extend upwards out of the body and travel back around in two arcs into the base of your torso. The classical name of this orbit, the 'large Heavenly orbit', describes accurately where this circulation takes place. It circulates outside of the body within the 'large Heaven' of the macrocosm as opposed to the 'small Heaven' microcosm of the human body.

The clearest sign of the 'large water wheel' opening is that there is a very strong movement of the Jing and Blood as the core of the body opens. This raises your natural body temperature which then remains higher than it was previously. Your lower abdomen will always have a strong glowing heat radiating from this area, and your hands and feet will rarely be cold. In addition, the Jing begins to move, which results in the feelings of whole-body 'bliss' that many spiritual traditions talk about. These feelings of bliss have been experienced by most people at the point of orgasm as well as just afterwards. The energetic feeling that moves through the body during orgasm now radiates up and down the length of the Chong Mai and throughout the rest of the body. This is a temporary stage which should not be focused upon, however, as it will prevent you moving further into your Nei Dan practice. Systems that focus too heavily upon this whole-body bliss sensation have a glass ceiling as their goal has stopped them from moving onwards. This is the same for any system that focuses upon any one particular state or attainment. If you fixate upon the sensations that arise during the opening of the 'large water wheel', you will be stuck there and your development will finish. You should acknowledge any experience and then continue with your practice as if it were not important.

Providing you have not fixated upon the process, you will find that the body becomes used to the feelings and so the sensations are normalized to the point of not being felt any more. Instead, what is left is a gentle pulling at the crown of the head and at the base of the perineum. A strong circulation of information can be felt running through the sides of the torso and you should also find that your ability to tangibly feel what is going on within your body now extends out to include the whole of your auric field as well. You have managed to connect your energy body to the macrocosm and so sensation is no longer limited to the limits of your physical body.

The importance of the 'large water wheel' becomes clear once it has circulated for some time. It enables you to strongly connect with and exchange energetic information with the environment. This is the basis for Shen Gong exercises, which are a form of energetic practice that strongly uses the Yi to exchange Qi with environmental bodies ranging from trees through to individual stars and planets. Many of the later Daoist practices revolved around this kind of work; due to many people disbelieving such practices, however, many of these aspects of Daoist Nei Gong are no longer widely taught. It is true that anybody with a good understanding of Qi Gong can undertake these practices, especially women, who are naturally far more environmentally connected than men, but attaining the 'large water wheel' increases the strength of these exercises tenfold. Exchanging information in this way becomes one of the most efficient ways to balance your own internal environment if you are given the correct guidance. You will also find that you will begin to intuitively understand the nature of the energy within the environment when you practise. Arts such as Feng Shui become simple to understand as you can actually feel what is going on. You will also understand the best times to practise in order to harness the energy you need, the best locations and even which direction to face. Energy-based therapists such as acupuncturists will find that they intuitively understand the nature of their patients' imbalances, which makes diagnosis all the more easy. All of this is because of the Shen that is transferred around the orbit. This Shen then enables a direct transference of information into your consciousness which brings with it the information you require.

IMMORTAL GUIDANCE

Previously when writing about the Chong Mai and the 'large water wheel', I have avoided discussing the more esoteric aspects of this circulation. There were a few reasons for this. The first is that it is always difficult to write about something that you know many will find hard to believe. I am a practising alchemist on top of the other internal arts I have spent most of my life studying, but I am not an enlightened being and so still have a strong acquired nature. That aspect of the acquired nature does not like being laughed at, and so I avoided writing about a subject that I knew would potentially create ridicule within the internal arts community. The second main reason is that self-delusion is our worst enemy in these practices. It is easy to allow the imagination to run wild and believe that something is happening when really it is not. A simple experience can

be blown out of all proportion by the imagination and so we can be led off our path by a misunderstanding. If I write about contacting immortals through the Chong Mai opening, then I know that there is a risk that I may contribute to this. On the other hand, I believe that there has been too much holding back of information within the Daoist arts, and that is part of the reason why so many people are held back in their practice. I think that everybody should have access to the information that is available so that they can use it to progress as deeply as possible in their practice.

The Chong Mai can act as a kind of 'spiritual antenna' when it is fully open. This antenna extends upwards into the realms of Heaven which are, in my opinion, different levels of vibrational resonance beyond the scale of reality that we are generally able to communicate with. It is within these realms that higher states of consciousness can lead us and this is what became oversimplified into immortals residing within the Heavens. What is definitely the case is that some kind of consciousness resides within these realms and they can be contacted once the Chong Mai extends out to its furthest reaches. This is the stage that many esoteric Daoist sects refer to as gaining an immortal teacher – something that some traditions state is required for full realization of the potential of arts such as Nei Dan. One teacher explained it to me as though the immortals look down on us from the immortal realms but can only see darkness. Once the Chong Mai is fully awake, it is like a beacon in the darkness. They can then see us and so, if they choose, can take us on as a student.

When an immortal teacher takes a student, it is normal for the student to be accelerated through their internal transformation process to a very high degree. Deep levels of alchemical work can be entered into very quickly with an amazingly high level of intuition when it comes to grasping concepts and practices. In the early stages of training it is normal for the immortal teacher to begin taking control of the student's body and moving it around as if it is a puppet on a string. Some students then enter into a kind of trance so that they do not remember what happened during this time, whereas others are fully aware of what has been taking place. Always afterwards, the movements they have performed can be remembered and repeated. It is amazing how the student being taken through this process performs sequences that would normally be beyond their level of coordination and skill. When they are being taken through these movements, they never come to any harm, no matter what terrain they are practising on. After some time the student can then begin to hear the voice of their teacher, sometimes speaking to them in their own language and sometimes not.

Only some students are ever able to see their teacher standing before them, usually during sitting practice. A common phenomenon is being able to see their eyes clearly staring at them through the darkness during Nei Dan practice. These contacts are always stronger at night, on full moons and far away from society. All of this strikes me as amazingly similar to the stories from within so many traditions of people contacting deities, angels and guides, and Daoism is no different, although it states that the immortals were once human beings who managed to elevate their consciousness to the level of being able to remain within the immortal realm, a higher-frequency place which only those who reach similar states can contact. The question I have is of the actual individual level of sentient consciousness held by the immortals who are being contacted. To what degree is the consciousness belonging to an individual immortal and to what degree is that consciousness converted into something that we can understand through our mind? Are we contacting levels of collective information which it is easiest for our minds to convert into the image of an immortal, or is sentient immortality actually a possibility? Although I have my own theories on this, I can never give any absolute answers. All I know is that it is a fascinating process to watch an accomplished Daoist practitioner being taught by their spiritual teacher in this manner. I can offer no definite conclusions on exactly what the nature of these immortal teachers is, but I feel blessed to have witnessed such an aspect of Daoism.

Of course, the obvious question at this point is: What are the risks around this? There are as many stories of negative spirits as there are of benevolent guides. In the West, we are actually in something of a minority because most people throughout the rest of the world still carry the belief of the spirit world being an actuality, something we live in and around on a daily basis. The general disbelief in this aspect of existence is only because of the place where we were born and the scientifically based system we were brought up in. If we had been born in a tribal village, we would hold very different belief structures. I can only offer my opinions in this area which are made up of my own belief structure and my own witnessed experience. Yes, I think it is possible to attract negative spirits and I also believe that possession is not only possible but far more common than many would want to believe. I have come across groups in Asia who deliberately aim to open the antenna of the Chong Mai and call in what we class as negative spirits in order to gain power from the possession they experience. It was both ugly and quite scary to watch what happened during their practice rituals, and I can only imagine what happened to the energetic and psychological

health of the participants of these rituals. In order to attract the 'right' sort of spiritual connection, it is all about the student's own energetic and spiritual resonance. Each spiritual tradition has its own set of guidelines or precepts, as discussed in Chapter 3. These precepts are designed for a specific purpose and that is to ensure that the resonance of the individual student within that tradition is in line with the tradition itself. When the Xing of the practitioner is cultivated to a certain level, they begin to give off a form of information that resonates with the teachings of the tradition they are within. For Daoism, it is the combination of humility, humour and compassion that causes a certain resonance within the practitioner's Xing which then provides the right kind of spiritual 'magnet' to attract the correct type of spiritual transmission down through the antenna of the Chong Mai. In short, manifesting the precepts of Daoism attracts a Daoist immortal. If you manifest the precepts of Buddhism within your Xing, then you will attract Buddhist spiritual teachers and so on for every tradition. The quality of how you manifest the psychological state of the tradition you study within will dictate how well you establish the magnet within your Xing to set you up for gaining the right sort of spiritual guidance. In the same way, those with deep-rooted fears, insecurities or hatred will begin to attract spiritual attention which resonates with that kind of Xing. Thus possession as we understand it becomes a possibility. It is the worst kind of combination to be naturally open to the spirit world but to have no kind of spiritual tradition to follow. This is like having a Xing that resonates with the realm of spirits but no precepts or practices to adjust your frequency to the healthiest place. This is why so many natural 'psychics' end up drained by what they do because they don't necessarily draw their help from the healthiest source.

At the same time, although this kind of study is very interesting, it should not be focused upon. Aiming to contact immortals and spirits is unhealthy. It develops completely the wrong kind of Xing which resonates with concepts of dependency. Every psychological trait is a frequency of some kind and that is why Xing cultivation is so important within Daoism. I have included this section of the book for the sake of completeness. Although it is important to understand this stage, it should not be focused upon. The Nei Dan process does not rely on this part of the 'large water wheel'; if it is meant to happen, it will – in its own time. If your personal belief system does not go this far with regard to the more esoteric sides of the practice, then there is again no problem because it is not a necessary part of the process.

Chapter 9

THE ALCHEMICAL AGENTS

Beyond the stage of entering stillness and learning to stabilize it are the various stages of harvesting the alchemical agents. These are the ingredients required to form the Dan (丹), the elixir pill which is then consumed to lead a practitioner towards transcendence. Nei Dan is essentially a process that leads a person towards the stage of seeking out the alchemical agents and forming the elixir from them. Any form of Daoist meditation that does not strive to reach the stage of forming the alchemical elixir should not really be classed as Nei Dan – internal alchemy. Rather, these would be forms of seated practice based on Daoist philosophical concepts. Not all Daoist sects include Nei Dan within their tradition.

Figure 9.1 shows a famous chart depicted within the classical text *Xing Ming Gui Zhi* (性命圭旨), which can be translated as meaning the 'principles of our Xing and Ming'. This text was written in 1615 and contains a great deal of metaphorical guidance on the Nei Dan process.

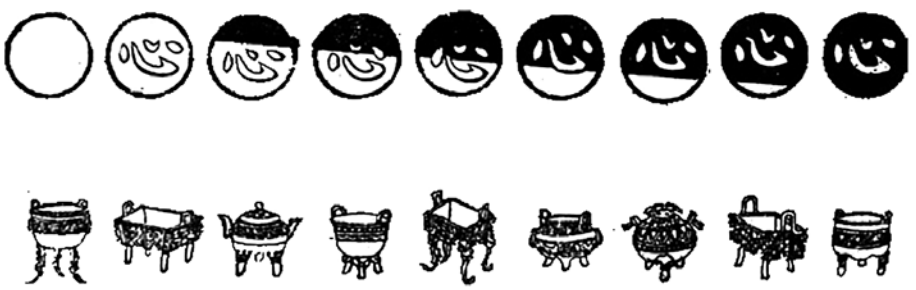


Figure 9.1: The Nine Cauldrons

The nine cauldrons depicted in Figure 9.1 are read from right to left and show a gradual movement through the alchemical process of Nei Dan. Each cauldron represents a full stage of transformation which should take place within the Nei Dan practitioner. Although there are nine cauldrons, it is at

cauldron four that the alchemical agents appear, which shows just how long and involved the alchemical process really is. It is said that it is possible for a man to take nine years to attain the state of transcendence through the process of Nei Dan, whereas a woman can do it in six years. I must be extremely slow as it has taken me longer than this to only begin to touch around the stage of the fourth cauldron! In my mind, it is around the fourth cauldron that we begin to move from the foundation to the intermediate stages of Nei Dan training. The advanced stages of alchemy still involve a long process in their own right, which involves working almost exclusively within the realm of Xing. This chapter will look at bridging the gap between the foundation and intermediate stages of practice and briefly summarize some of the more advanced aspects of alchemical training.

CONTROLLING THE LIGHTS

A description I have heard for Nei Dan is 'controlling the lights'. At its more advanced stages I would agree that this is a good description of what Nei Dan is all about. This is because the brain translates our experiences of the San Bao so that we may understand our connection to them. This goes back to the basic theory of the three treasures of Jing, Qi and Shen being simply forms of information. These three forms of information are three vibrations that exist at different frequencies. At its most dense, lowest frequency, it becomes Jing; as we speed up this vibration, it becomes Qi and then Shen. The process of Yang involves speeding up the frequency, making our essence convert upwards towards consciousness, whereas the process of Yin is the gradual slowing down of frequencies in the other direction. Understanding this theory helps us to understand a lot of what is taking place within arts such as Nei Dan and Qi Gong.

When our mind experiences a strong movement within one of these three sources of information, it gives us an experience. Like all other sensory-based experiences, it is not a 'real' experience in that it is generated by the brain and the nervous system. If we did not have these experiences created within our own mind, we would not be able to interact with the world we live in. When our Jing moves, we experience the sensation of strong heat which seems to bubble. That is why we get such sensations when we circulate the congenital fluid during the 'firing process'. This is because the threshold between the acquired and the congenital stages of our training sits within our Jing. The 'firing process' is the stage of alchemical transformation often simplified to being called 'converting Jing'. When our

Qi moves, we experience movement and directional forces, which is why we experience pulling sensations and vibrations through the body when we open up channels and circulate energy. This stage can be described, more simply, as 'converting Qi'. The highest frequency vibration that we experience is the movement of consciousness or spirit – Shen. When Shen moves, we experience colours and, most importantly, light. This is important as the stages of moving beyond Wuji into the harvesting of the alchemical agents all involve the manipulation of lights. This is the stage often known as 'converting Shen'. Table 9.1 summarizes this concept.

Table 9.1: Experiencing the San Bao

'Substance'	Experience	Stage
Jing	Heat	Converting Jing
Qi	Movement	Converting Qi
Shen	Light	Converting Shen

Up until this stage you will no doubt have already seen various lights going off during your practice. The 'white mist' is one such example, along with the glowing light that you will no doubt have cultivated within either the lower or middle Dan Tien, depending upon your gender. These lights are all aspects of Shen which are being converted and moved during your training as the layers of the acquired mind begin to break down. Locating and harvesting the alchemical agents involves going beyond this into working with the aspects of spirit often known as 'seed consciousness', the core of consciousness directly related to your Yang Shen. When these 'substances' appear within the emptiness of your sitting practice, they are collected and worked with in order to change the way in which your consciousness functions.

ESTABLISHING YOUR WORKSHOP

In the same way that an external alchemist needs a good workshop within which to conduct his experiments, an internal alchemist must adequately prepare his internal workshop before harvesting the alchemical agents. The congenital meridians need to be open and vibrating at the frequency of Shen – pure light – before there is any chance of the pill appearing for you. This pill has then to move and react with the orbits of the meridians

in order for any alchemical merging to take place. In order for this to happen, we must sit and refine the frequency of our mind upwards to a point whereby our main connection is with the realm of spirit. The physical world must have faded away into the realm of Wuji, and the energetic system must have been refined upwards to a state of resonating with the realm of Shen. This will happen as a natural consequence of our practice of Nei Dan as we refine our practice to increasingly deep levels.

If we wish to understand how this works, we can think of the various stages of conscious refinement as shown in Figure 9.2. This image shows a person who is at the earliest stage of awareness, prior to any training in Nei Dan or other internal arts.



Figure 9.2: Tuned in to the Physical World

At this stage, the person's mind is tuned in purely to the physical world. Reality is only a state of awareness, a frequency that we are tuned in to through the state of our mind. The energetic and spiritual realms of Qi and Shen are only higher stages of refinement which can be accessed sequentially if we understand how to cultivate our level of perception. In the state shown in Figure 9.2 we are acutely aware of the physical world with which we are interacting. At this stage in our development, the realm of Qi is only one step away. It is a higher-level state that we are not fully tuned in to but may have some subconscious awareness of. This may manifest as subtle, unexplained sensations which are too often disregarded as irrelevant.

As we begin to develop in our practice, we consolidate our Jing and refine our frequency of awareness upwards into the realm of Qi, the energy world. This may happen through deep Qi Gong training as well as Nei Dan. As we reach this level, we begin to develop a strong connection to

the energy world which brings it from our subconscious awareness into our immediate range of perception. This is the stage shown in Figure 9.3.

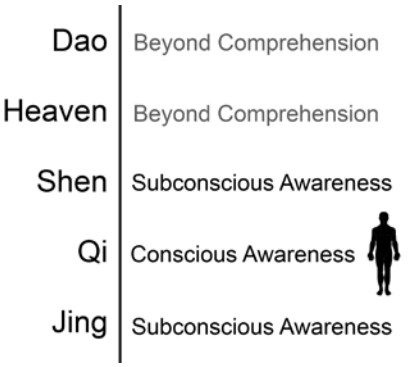


Figure 9.3: Tuned in to the Energy World

When a person reaches this stage, they become fully aware of what is taking place within the energetic realm. The meridian system can clearly be felt moving through the body, together with the various circulations and pulses of Qi that take place within the rest of the energy body. For many practitioners of Qi Gong exercises, this is the stage of fully immersing yourself into the practice. Here it moves beyond a casual health maintenance programme into a way of life. In Nei Dan this level of perception usually becomes available to you even in the early stages of developing a regular sitting practice.

When your focus is mainly upon the energetic level, you will find that the physical body is now one step beyond where your awareness is tuned in. The external world begins to fade into the background, becoming secondary to the movements of Qi which you are observing. In addition, the realm of Shen, which was previously beyond your range of perception, now moves into your subconscious range, meaning that you may begin to perceive the movements of the spirits. These will appear as the lights that you will no doubt have already seen by this stage in your practice. These lights vary in brightness and intensity, depending upon the level of your awareness as well as the state of your acquired mind. This level of tuning in is more than adequate for the previous stage of Nei Dan development, but in order to progress we must fully slip into Wuji and then refine our awareness upwards so that Shen becomes our focal point, as shown in Figure 9.4.



Figure 9.4: Tuned in to the Consciousness Realm

At this level, the physical world is two steps away from your main focal point, meaning that it disappears from your range of perception. This is why the world seems to disappear and the experience of pure emptiness begins to take place during prolonged Zuo Wang sitting. This is the Wuji state that we need to stabilize within our practice in order to move into the deeper stages of alchemical training. At this stage even the realm of Qi is one step away, meaning that it begins to fade into the background.

Although this may be an oversimplified model of what is taking place, it is a useful concept when trying to understand what is happening in our practice. It helps to show what level of awareness we must reach in order to prepare the body for the formation of the elixir pill.

When we are practising any form of internal arts, it is normal for us to begin to experience short periods of awareness shifts. These temporary changes of state move us between these different levels of perception, but our goal is to move to the third state, the state shown in Figure 9.4, so that we may remain there and allow the foundations of our inner workshop to be established. As we remain in this state of deep inner awareness, we can begin to develop the congenital meridian system further so that it begins to resonate with a circulation of Shen information.

THE LUMINOUS RAYS OF THE FA LUN WHEEL

When the 'small water wheel' of the Du and Ren meridians reaches the fourth level of attainment, it will begin to emit what are often translated as the 'luminous rays'. These are the spiritual light of your awareness reaching the Shen range and then reacting with the information circulating within this orbit. The information running through the 'small water wheel' at this

level is a combined movement of the five spirits as they take the form of Yuan Shen. Some schools of Daoism refer to this stage as attaining the Fa Lun (法輪) wheel, which can be translated as the 'wheel of Karmic law'. The 'small water wheel', through which you previously circulated the congenital fluid, now begins to emit a white light which glows like a ring around you. It is said that this white light begins to burn up the Karmic stains that you have accumulated within this and previous lifetimes; this is obviously a concept that has been absorbed from Buddhism. The white light of the 'small water wheel' will glow and then gradually begin to move in time with your breath. As you inhale, the light pulses upwards along your back, and as you exhale, it moves down your front. This stage is akin to the tenets of the *Xi Sui Jing* (洗髓經), the 'marrow washing classic', a classical text attributed to the Shaolin (少林) patriarch, Bodhi Dharma. In this text it states that the spiritual light of Shen should nourish the marrow of the body as well as the substance of the brain. This takes place when the Fa Lun wheel awakens and the luminous rays circulate within the congenital Du and Ren meridians.

When the circulation of light is attained, you should make this the focus of your practice for quite some time. The light will continue to appear in your practice, which by this stage will have reached sitting sessions of two or more hours. If you are unable to sit for this length of time, then it is unrealistic to imagine you would progress any further. Classical guidance states that this wheel needs to be circulated for 300 revolutions and many mistakenly believe this means 300 times around the orbit, which would essentially be 300 breaths. This is not the case: the 300 circulations it is referring to are 300 revolutions of day and night, meaning that for roughly ten months you will be circulating the wheel at this stage to ensure that your Shen is fully nourishing the spiritual level of the 'small water wheel'. This circulation should be continued within your practice sessions until you are ready to move on; a clear sign of being ready is the appearance of the first alchemical agent, the light of Yuan Shen.

THE APPEARANCE OF YUAN SHEN

The first alchemical agent to discuss is Yuan Shen. Yuan Shen is the condensed version of the five spiritual lights of the Wu Xing prior to their refraction. It is the congenital aspect of consciousness prior to your mind dividing into transient sections which generate the difference between the acquired and the congenital mind. Figure 9.5 shows the refraction of the five lights from Yuan Shen.

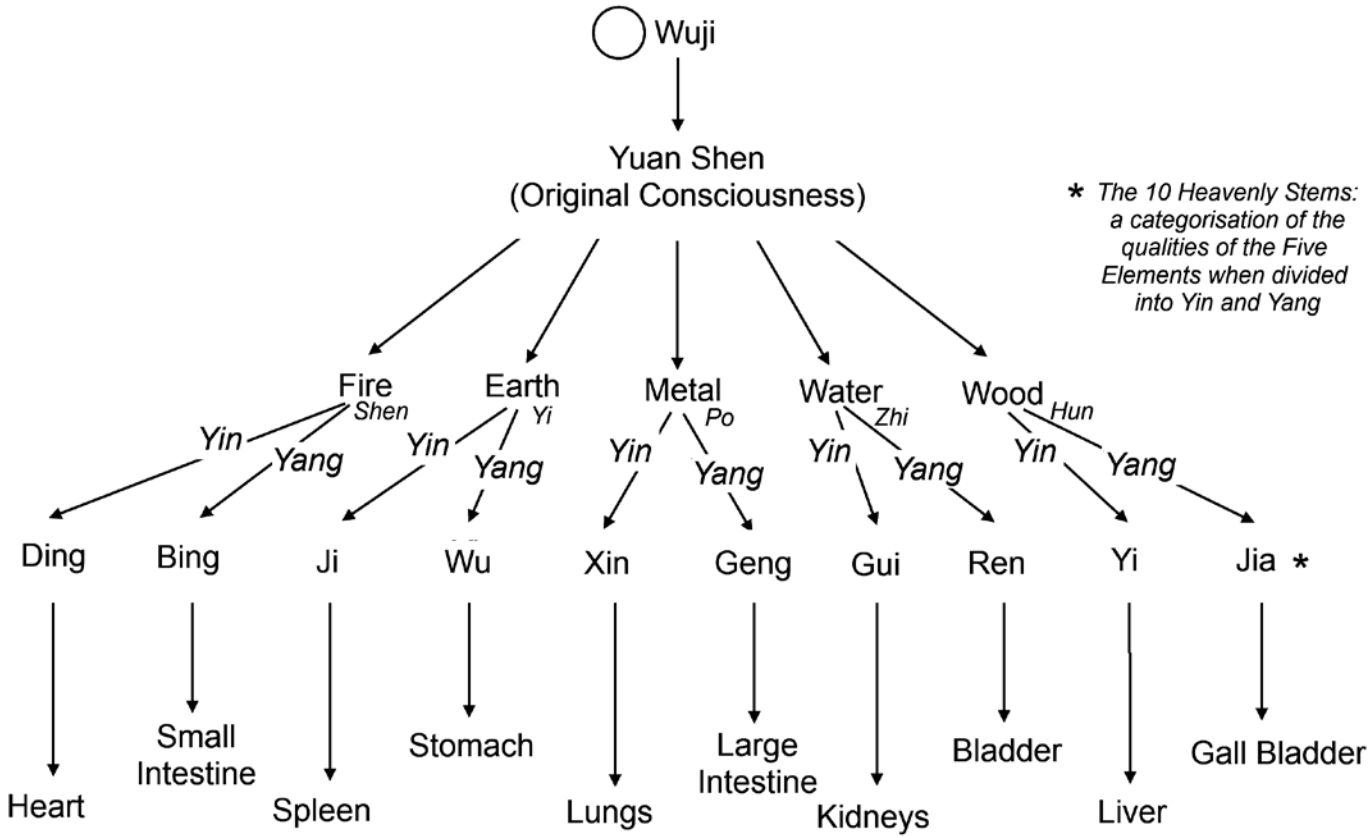


Figure 9.5: The Refraction of Yuan Shen

The chart shows how the original consciousness of Yuan Shen is born from the potential of Wuji at the point of our creation. This is the seed for the five spiritual lights which are then refracted out from Yuan Shen as it reaches the realm of manifestation – the acquired. These five lights become the five spirits of Shen, Hun, Yi, Po and Zhi. They are the spiritual basis for the Wu Xing movements within us. From here, further refraction via division into Yin and Yang gives us the spiritual basis for the formation of the various organs of the body into which consciousness is rooted. For a more complete discussion of this concept, please refer to my book *Heavenly Streams: Meridian Theory in Nei Gong*.

By entering stillness, we will return the five spirits to a state prior to refraction which generates Yuan Shen. This is the reversal of spirit. In the earlier stages of training, this experience of Yuan Shen will have been vague and momentary, resulting in the 'white mist' or experiences of a brilliant white colour which filled your vision. However, we require this reversal of the refraction of the spirits to be carried out to a far higher degree so that they fully form an experience of Yuan Shen for us. Once we have done this, we will perceive one of the alchemical agents required for generating the elixir pill. Note that classically it is said that the following stages of observing and working with Xing and Ming can only take place between the hours of 11pm and 1am. Although I would agree that this is required in the early phases of locating the alchemical agents, experienced practitioners can reach the same levels outside these hours.

The alchemical agent Yuan Shen needs to be in the form of a solid white sphere of brilliant light which hovers in front of our vision. This white light is known by many names including 'true silver' and, my personal favourite, 'white moon on the mountain peak'. The mountain peak is a metaphor for the head taken from the imagery in the Nei Jing Tu. The white moon is the Yuan Shen; when you see it, you will understand why. It is like looking at the full moon right in front of you. The first few times I perceived Yuan Shen it was as if a black blanket over a window had suddenly had a hole cut in it so that sunlight was shining through. In some traditional Daoist schools they state that the reason you perceive the white light of Yuan Shen as a solid ball instead of a hazy cloud is that a deeper layer of the upper Dan Tien has opened up. This is shown in Figure 9.6.

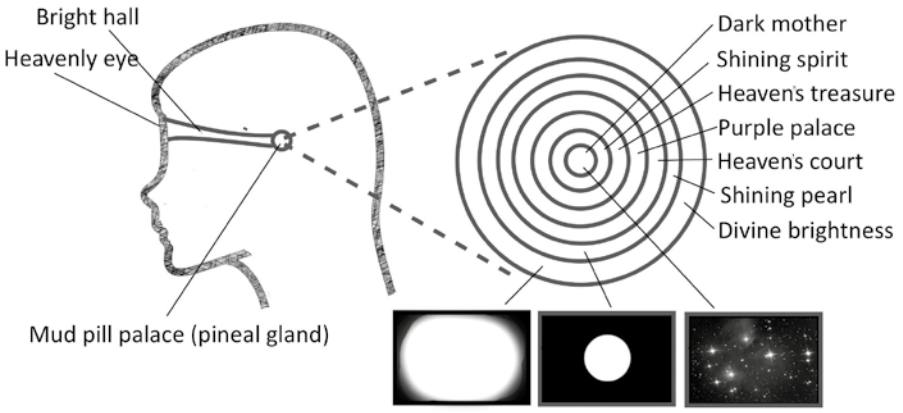


Figure 9.6: The Pill and the Upper Dan Tien

Image A shows contact with Yuan Shen through an experience of the outer layer of the upper Dan Tien. At this stage it still appears as a hazy white light. In image B the second layer of the upper Dan Tien has been touched, which is the layer known as the 'shining pearl'. At this stage the white light can condense into the circular disc of the Yuan Shen alchemical agent. Image C shows touching the centre of the upper Dan Tien at the stage of 'crushing the Shen' to return it to emptiness, which is a much later stage of practice.

The alchemical agent of the white light will form itself when the time is right. It can take quite a long time, so do not be impatient. Impatience or excessive striving will only make its appearance unlikely because these are facets of acquired mind. Again, do not imagine the appearance of the white light as there is no need. Anything imagined is a product of the acquired mind. The true alchemical agent must appear as a by-product of the process you are going through in your Nei Dan practice. In the meantime you will perceive the 'white mist' which should be led to the correct Dan Tien as before. Each time you do this you are contributing to the cauldron where you will eventually receive the alchemical agents in order to fuse them together. This is the process discussed in Chapter 6.

Figure 9.7 shows a classical depiction of the formation of Yuan Shen from the refracted five spirits of the acquired mind. Again, this image is taken from the *Xing Ming Gui Zhi*.



Figure 9.7: The Five Qi Return to the Source

The five sages represent the five spirits of Shen, Hun, Yi, Zhi and Po. They are looking upwards at the full moon which represents the light of Yuan Shen appearing from within the space of Wuji. Surrounding the moon are clouds which represent tendrils of acquired mind still clinging to the sphere of Yuan Shen. These clouds actually appear as a haziness over your perception of the white light. They will clear with time as the Yuan Shen becomes clearer to you.

When the Yuan Shen agent appears, you now need to work with the physical root of the upper Dan Tien which is the 'mud pill palace'; this is essentially the pineal gland. In order to do this, you should bring your awareness directly back from the white light very slowly until you reach the centre of your head. Because you are still sitting within Wuji, an exact location for the centre of the head is difficult to define, which is why you should just move straight back from the light as shown in Figure 9.8. This will give you the height of the 'mud pill palace'.

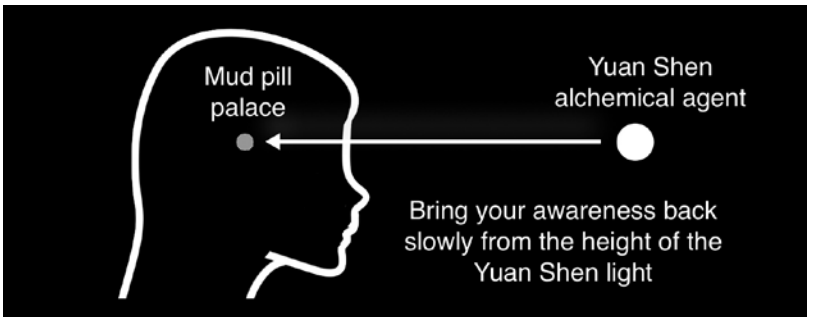


Figure 9.8: Locating the Mud Pill Palace

Move very slowly, staying on the same level all the way back. You will know when you reach the 'mud pill palace' as your mouth will fill with the sweet-tasting fluid you previously experienced during the opening of the congenital 'small water wheel'. This fluid comes as a reaction of the Yi touching the root of the upper Dan Tien. There is a lot of this fluid, which should be swallowed as previously discussed. When you reach this point, remain with your awareness here; gradually, a warmth will begin to spread out from the region of the centre of your head over the whole of your body. This is a result of the congenital fluid beginning to 'nourish the marrow of your brain', which is an alchemical term for the Jing moving through the various areas of your brain and skull. After some time at this stage you will find that the white light begins to move back towards the 'mud pill palace' as well. It is vitally important that you do not use your intention to try to move the light. This should never be the case as it is unnecessarily forceful and can create quite severe imbalances in the mind that are very difficult to repair. Instead, just place your awareness gently on the 'mud pill palace' and allow the Yuan Shen light to move when it is ready. In my experience, the process of moving the light once you have placed your awareness in the correct location can take some time – a good 20 minutes or so – as it does not move quickly. Just be patient and keep your awareness fixed on its location.

A note should be added here that the first time I carried out this stage of the practice I had a strong pain in the centre of my head which was like a white-hot heat accompanied by a pressure somewhat akin to a severe migraine. Needless to say, this is a sign of incorrect practice! I had not fully opened the congenital 'small water wheel', meaning that I could not recycle back into my system the energy that was rushing to my head during this stage of the training. I had to step back for several weeks and return to the earlier stages of my practice until this problem alleviated itself. Never force through any experiences like this because you are working with the very blueprints of your inner consciousness. Forcing the work at this stage can be very dangerous: it is like reaching into a computer without knowing what you are doing and randomly changing code around.

Now, each time you move into your sitting practice, you will find that the white light of Yuan Shen automatically begins to glow out from the 'mud pill palace' region of your head. By gently focusing upon it you will find that the strength of the glow increases, although there is no real need once you reach this stage. Instead, return to Wuji and in time the second alchemical agent will appear for you.

THE SECOND ALCHEMICAL AGENT

The second alchemical agent generally, but not always, appears after the Yuan Shen has been successfully relocated to the 'mud pill palace'. The second alchemical agent is known as 'true gold' and is condensed from the energies of your Ming. It is the seed of your Jing that has been stilled to the point of reversing the 'congenital to acquired process'.

The second agent appears as a bright yellow light which appears just in front of the height of the lower Dan Tien in men and the middle Dan Tien in women. As with the previous agent, you are no longer seeing with the eyes; you are actually seeing through the 'bright hall' aspect of your energy body which is the tunnel of perception running from the centre of the upper Dan Tien out towards the forehead, between your eyebrows. This is the tunnel that gives access to the 'spiritual eye', often known as the 'third eye' in many spiritual traditions. The alchemical agents cannot be seen with the physical eyes; instead, they rely on the 'spiritual eye' which can perceive into the higher-level realms of consciousness.

It should be noted that the opening of the 'spiritual eye' or the 'third eye' is something that almost every 'new-age' tradition discusses. It is often mentioned in passing as though it is a very easy thing to do. According to Daoism, the 'spiritual eye' opens in two stages. The first is the inner opening of the eye and the second is the outer opening of the eye, which is the complete stage of opening. The inner stage of opening the 'spiritual eye' involves opening the connecting point between the area between the eyebrows and the centre of the upper Dan Tien. When this happens, you are granted the ability of 'inner vision', which means that you can begin to perceive the movement of Jing, Qi and Shen within the realm of your own body. This is required for perceiving the alchemical agents that you are attempting to harvest in this stage of your practice. Initially, this stage of opening only gives you perception of the energy moving within your own body, but later a limited ability to perceive the energetic systems of other people as well as their auric field can develop. It is these abilities that some people are naturally born with to varying degrees. The appearance of a person's energy body will be very unique to you because the 'spiritual eye' does not so much see as take in information from the energetic realm and then translate it into a form that your mind will be able to understand. This means that although some information will be the same, as we all have inbuilt archetypes, much of our perception will be unique to us. This becomes apparent when students who have reached this level come and

ask me what it means when there is a particular colour or shape glowing around a person's energy body. I have to tell them that I do not know as my own visual experience of the state of the energy body will vary from theirs. This is why a study of Chinese medicine is important at this stage: you must have clear confirmation of your experience from another diagnostic source. In this way, over time, you gain enough experience to understand the nature of the information that your 'spiritual eye' is perceiving.

The external opening of the 'spiritual eye' is the full stage of opening, which is very advanced. I have never personally met anybody who has attained this stage, although there are many tales of people have reached such a level. Once open, you will supposedly have the ability to perceive the past, present and future equally, and be able to travel to any place in the cosmos as well as into the immortal realm. Sadly, although it sounds rather wonderful, I don't believe that I will ever achieve this!

The yellow sphere of the second alchemical agent will remain sitting in front of you as shown in Figure 9.9. When you have managed this, you will have perceived the two key alchemical agents of Xing and Ming known as 'true silver' and 'true gold'.

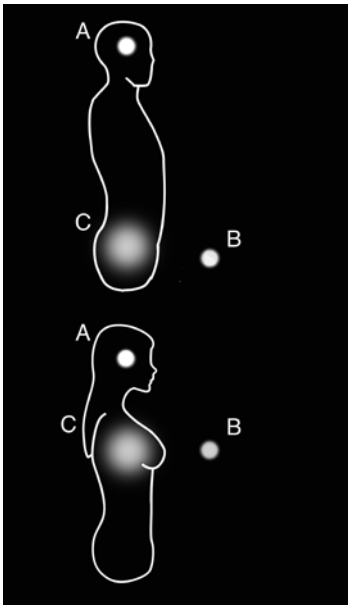


Figure 9.9: True Silver and True Gold

These are the refined versions of Shen and Jing which form two of the key ingredients used to create the elixir pill, a major concern of alchemical

Daoist meditation practices. The orbs marked with the letter A are the lights of 'true silver' which are the manifestations of Yuan Shen, the stilling of your Xing to the point of returning to the source. The orbs marked B are 'true gold', the alchemical agents of your Ming when condensed to the point of becoming an alchemical agent. This is the yellow light that appears in front of the lower Dan Tien for men and the middle Dan Tien for women. The reason for its varying location is the location of refined Jing within both genders. Marked with a letter C is the cultivated Ding of the Dan Tien where the agents must then be mixed in order to fully realize the stage of 'merging the three treasures of Jing, Qi and Shen' to form the alchemical pill. The ability to do this will depend on how much you have successfully managed to cultivate the Ding through the absorption of the 'white mist' as well as through the consolidation of your Jing through the 'firing process'.

THE MANDALA

A common phenomenon that can manifest at this stage of your Nei Dan practice is the appearance of Mandala-style geometric shapes during periods of mental stillness. I have spoken to many practitioners of meditation who have seen these shapes, but very few discuss them. Many practitioners have ignored them and placed them in the same category as the other mental images that appear; in fact, however, they are something very different.

Mandala is a Sanskrit term and something normally associated with Buddhism. Any visit to a Tibetan Buddhist temple will show you a wide variety of Mandala images; some of them are incredibly detailed with all sorts of images of Buddhist deities mixed in with the squares and circles from which they are generally made. More than just a form of artwork, they are also representative of an experience to be had from sitting meditation.

In the early stages of practice it is quite normal to perceive all manner of mental images, especially if you are a very visual person. Usually, these are images derived from your memory as the acquired mind grows restless. I think of it as a kind of panic that your acquired mind goes through when it realizes that you are trying to get it to grow silent. This mental chatter is produced from deep within various layers of your mind and can take some time to slow down. Alongside this mental chatter, it is normal to begin seeing geometric shapes such as circles, triangles, squares and so on. These come in the form of coloured lines which then begin to interlock and move off into the distance. At first they are faint and very brief, but after some time they begin to become more solid.

When you reach the stage of being able to enter into Wuji, you will discover that the geometric patterns become more complex as well as more defined. They are so clear that they cannot be ignored. They begin to form beautiful geometric patterns.

What you are seeing is another way in which the Shen shows itself to you when it begins to shift. Although light is what we are ultimately after, consciousness is the basis of all existence. This means that when Shen moves you will experience the 'building blocks' of existence in different ways. Geometric shapes are now recognized as being the foundation of all matter on Earth; a quick internet search will bring up a great deal of information on sacred geometry, the power that geometric shapes have as they are directly related to the formation of Shen at its deepest level. This is why many arts such as Feng Shui work so well. At Feng Shui's deepest level, it is utilizing particular patterns that are directly reflective of the shapes formed within the core of our consciousness. Ancient traditions understood the geometric nature of existence, which is why the patterns appeared so often amongst their art and architecture.

If these geometric patterns rise, then enjoy them but do not attach to them. They are a sign of your consciousness beginning to shift, but they should come and go like every other experience to be had during meditation.

SUBMERGING THE AGENTS

The third aspect of the pill is Yuan Xi – original breath. It is the course of life that is breathed through your system while in the congenital stages of development. It is this substance that later forms your Qi, the vital information which your existence relies upon. In order to combine these three together, you now have to submerge the agents of 'true silver' and 'true gold' in the correct location, using your awareness as a guiding point for the movement of the white and yellow lights. In the case of men, the mind should be placed within the lower Dan Tien, whereas women should place their mind within the middle Dan Tien. Up until this point you should have been collecting the 'white mist' within these regions. This will have been setting up the Ding of the Dan Tien ready for receiving the alchemical agents of Xing and Ming. It now takes a very high level of inner focus to merge them into the alchemical pill. If you manage it, then they will move as shown in Figure 9.10.

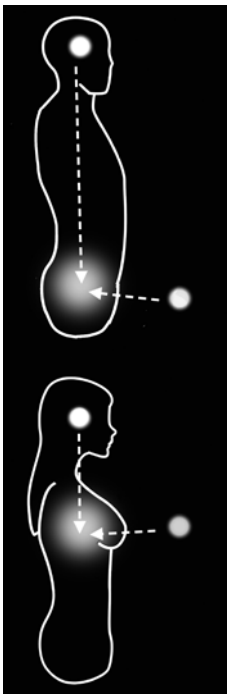


Figure 9.10: Movement of the Alchemical Agents

It is at this stage in the Nei Dan process that I am unable to give any more than theoretical guidance as I have not successfully managed to achieve this part of the process. As in my previous books, I believe it is important that I am open about which parts of the process I can give experiential guidance for and which parts I can only give theoretical teachings. Realistically, in order for me to successfully submerge the lights into the lower Dan Tien, I would have to be living in full retreat away from the world. This would mean sacrificing everything that is in my life at the moment. Although I currently spend several months each year in retreat, I am also travelling to teach and continue with my own training under various teachers as well. These are the limitations that my own personal life places on my level of progress. On top of that, there is still the ongoing struggle with the state of my acquired mind, which we are all going through all of the time.

This is important for all of us: to recognize what is possible and what it is that we hope to achieve from our practice. From my own personal perspective, I have experienced innumerable benefits to the state of my mind and my physical well-being. I find myself immersed in a fascinating study which I get to share with many people around the world, and, on top

of that, my journey will continue in this manner until my physical death. Several years ago, a teacher of mine offered me the chance to go into a full-time meditation retreat with him and some of his senior students for five years. Though greatly tempted, I declined because it did not feel like the right thing for me to do. I intuitively understood that my path did not lead me in that direction and it is not a decision that I have regretted in any way. There is a fine line which I think should be walked between the life of ascetic study and the life of the external world. It is a real skill to learn to bring these two together so that they can work in harmony. Although I may gain immeasurably from going into full-time retreat, I would lose out on many of the amazing experiences that life has to offer.

On a practical level, my own practice suffers from the lack of time needed to stabilize the levels discussed within this chapter. It took me a long period of intensive practice to attain the Fa Lun wheel of light through the Du and Ren channels. Although the classical guidance says 300 days, I managed to achieve this in around six and half months of regular sitting. At this time I was in South East Asia in a peaceful tropical location with very few distractions. After this time the two alchemical agents appeared, but this was as far as my consciousness was able to go at that time. Once I left this location and returned to teaching, it was more difficult to maintain this stage and gradually the light faded away. By returning to the 'external world', which required more attention from my acquired mind, I lost the level of awareness required for progression within the Nei Dan process. Now when I sit, I can manage to return to the wheel of light and also perceive the alchemical agents, but it is not with the same strength because I am not as fully away from the rest of life as I was before. During my periods of retreat it is much easier to get back to this stage but, as I have already said, I believe that the length of retreat I would require to move on is beyond what I am able to commit to. I plan to carry out this kind of retreat much later in my life, when the time feels right and my commitments have been met. For me personally, at the moment, the stage of entering Wuji is more than enough, along with the maintenance of the 'large water wheel' and the circulation of the congenital fluid. A regular practice of these stages keeps me fit and healthy, and enables me to continue working through the layers of the acquired mind. I would also argue that this is also enough for most practitioners. Those who wish for more should be prepared to make some major changes to their lifestyle!

For the rest of this chapter I will briefly outline the remaining stages of the Nei Dan process as I understand them. Note, though, that these stages

are from a purely theoretical perspective according to the teachings I have been given.

THE FORMATION OF THE DAN

The Dan or 'elixir pill' is formed from the condensed information of the Xing, the Ming and the Yuan Xi. It is the coming together of 'true silver' and 'true gold' within the Ding of the Dan Tien which generates the potential for realizing Nei Dan Gong. The 'fusing' together of these agents within the Dan Tien takes a lot of time and perseverance, and I have been assured that it is extremely hard work. The level of focus and time required to bring the agents together requires almost complete mastery of the will power because you are basically returning the three main substances of your existence back into their original state. When this is done, you will have produced a red pill which then sits within the correct Dan Tien.

This red pill is the pill of cinnabar, the red ore after which the Dan Tien is named. It is true Yang and manifestation of the full process of existence. This is the sum of the full condensing of the Xing and Ming. As far as I understand, very few people have managed this feat of attainment.

From here the pill should be 'swallowed'. This echoes the external alchemists' practice of forming a physical pill and then eating it in order to attain immortality. The pill is swallowed by rotating the red orb around the Fa Lun wheel for nine circulations. Once again, the number nine refers to circulations of time rather than actual rotations of the orbit and, as far as I am aware, this stage refers to nine months of focusing on the practice. These rotations are accomplished through a combination of intention as well as muscular contractions, using the same breathing methods as you did to shift the congenital fluid through the Du and Ren meridians.

After approximately nine months of rotating the red pill through these channels, it should have been nourished with your Shen to the point of forming the golden embryo – a stage of attainment that causes much debate within the Daoist community.

THE GOLDEN EMBRYO

Some have called the 'golden embryo' a metaphor for your true nature, although esoteric Daoists talk of something much more. They discuss the 'golden embryo' as being the consolidated sum of your spirits once they have been 'fertilized' by the rotation of the cinnabar orb through the Du

and Ren. According to Daoist teachings, the spirits then consolidate to such a level that they are able to exist as a stand-alone conscious entity which no longer requires the anchor of your physical body in order to exist. As discussed previously, the spirits require the physical root of your body in order to remain within the world of existence. It is upon your death, when these roots are severed, that the spirits disperse in various ways. The process of transmigration relies upon this process as the spirit of Hun is transferred to the next host in order to continue the everlasting cycles of birth and death. By nourishing the 'golden embryo', the Daoist Nei Dan practitioner learns to make the spirit strong enough that it may live independently of the body. Some will have experienced this within their life already through an out-of-body experience. It is common for people to talk of floating above the hospital bed during a life-threatening operation or above their body at the site of an accident. In these cases, the spirit may have been on some kind of a journey but it was ultimately pulled back to the physical body upon their recovery. There are too many of these experiences happening to not take them seriously, but they are still sadly ignored or put down to a lack of oxygen to the brain during near-death experiences. Interestingly, some accounts of out-of-body experience talk of a silver cord which attaches their spirit to the physical body. This cord seems to act as a kind of tether for the spirit, preventing it from going too far from its physical anchor. When I asked a teacher about this cord, he told me that it was the Shen aspect of the thrusting meridian that they were seeing. All spiritual life is attached to us through this important channel of the congenital energy body, which is why it is such a powerful meridian for use within Nei Gong practices and Chinese medicine.

There are various internal practices aimed at strengthening the spirit's independence so that it may leave the body at will. These 'soul travel' exercises are common within Daoist sects such as the Mao Shan (茅山) group, but ultimately it is only one aspect of the spirit that travels. Although it may bring back visual information, it cannot exist entirely separate from the body as it is still strongly anchored into the realm of existence. The 'golden embryo' is a far more advanced version of this practice, whereby the spirit no longer has any kind of tether to the physical body.

The alchemist who has attained the stage of the 'golden embryo' then spends a long time training his spirit to move and behave independently. This process is said to take years; it is like bringing up a child. This is a stage of cultivating the consciousness which requires full isolation from society. It is the level of full hermits who live high in the mountains or

deep in the forests. Only when they are ready do the alchemists choose to shed their physical body in order to live fully as a spiritual entity. When this happens, they actualize the famed 'rainbow body' of Buddhism, which is also known as the 'diamond body' within Daoism. At this stage the physical body fully dissolves, leaving only Shen behind. In the case of the rainbow body, there is a full dissolving into emptiness which results in the appearance of the five colours of the elements as they break down and return to Wuji. It has been recorded many times, mostly within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, that the practitioner who actualizes the 'rainbow body' vanishes, leaving only their clothes in a heap, their hair and their nails. As they vanish, a rainbow-coloured light either radiates out from them or appears in the sky above the site of their death.

'Diamond body' is a little different because in this case the five lights of spirit do not break down; instead, the full white light of Shen radiates out from the practitioner's body at the point of their 'dissolving', which is an indicator of the 'golden embryo' escaping its physical anchor where it will continue to exist as a spiritual entity commonly known as a Xian (仙) – an immortal. This is depicted in the classical image shown in Figure 9.11.



Figure 9.11: The Escape of the Golden Embryo

This is the final part of the 'physical' journey of the Nei Dan practitioner. From here, who knows what training continues in the form of a spiritual immortal?

A way to understand the different levels of attainment possible within the Daoist alchemical tradition is to look at the various terms outlined

within the classics. The basic levels of attainment were listed as the 'vulgar people', 'the natural people', 'the sages', 'the Zhen Ren' and the 'immortals'.

THE VULGAR PEOPLE

The 'vulgar people' is the rather non-politically correct term given to those people who do not follow the way of Dao. I always put the use of this term down to the unusual sense of humour of the early Daoists rather than a scathing attack on other people's way of living. It is said that the 'vulgar people' do not know the ways of preserving their health and so shorten the length of their Ming. They abuse themselves with wine and bad food while dividing themselves from the cycles of nature.

THE NATURAL PEOPLE

The 'natural people' are those who change their lifestyles to live more healthily. They eat what is right for their body and learn how to live in accordance with the energetic cycles of nature. It is said that they align themselves with the rhythms of the moon and live with the seasons. This level of attainment can be achieved through following the principles of Yang Sheng Fa and adopting a regular practice of Qi Gong or a similar art such as Yoga. It is said that 'natural people' live long and healthy Mings.

THE SAGES

The 'sages' are those who have managed to adapt their lifestyles to fit in with the rhythms of nature and the wider cosmos. They have freed their consciousness from the shackles of the acquired mind and so have freed the virtuous De from deep within. Emotional states of division are no longer a part of their being. They do not follow the cultural trends of normal society and thus are free from the development of acquired states. They are also aware of the profound empty state of reality and so live in a state of Wuji a lot of the time. They are said to live well past the age of 100 years and actualize the potential of their Ming. These were said to be the main transmitters of the alchemical tradition down into the Daoist sects.

THE ZHEN REN

The 'Zhen Ren' are the transcended humans we have discussed previously. This is a stage of attainment beyond the level of a sage. The Zhen Ren are said to be able to travel freely to any time or location in space with only the projection of their Shen. They are the masters of spirit travel and the holders of the knowledge of the universe. Many super-normal abilities are theirs and their lifespan is long and healthy. Despite this, they are still Earth-based beings and as such still a part of the cycle of transmigration which all life is subject to within the Eastern wisdom traditions.

THE IMMORTALS

The 'immortals' are those who are said to have attained the stage of freeing themselves from the bonds of the cycle of transmigration. The Daoist method of doing this was to master the process of Nei Dan, alchemical conversion of the substances of Xing and Ming within their being. The immortals are said to hold the poles of Yin and Yang within their being and to have mastered the nature of reality. The immortals are then divided into several sub-types: 'Earthly immortals', 'ghost immortals', 'spirit immortals' and 'Heavenly immortals'. Note that, beyond this, some traditions divide the categorization of immortals still further into different sub-sections. In my opinion, though, this kind of further analysis of 'immortal-types' is somewhat academic!

Earthly Immortals

The 'Earthly immortals' were those immortals who were said to have consolidated their Ming to such a level that they were beyond the usual limitations of biological ageing processes. They could live for hundreds, if not thousands, of years without showing any obvious signs of ageing. Many of the emperors of ancient China are said to have sought out this level of attainment and some are said to have died in the pursuit of this goal through dangerous means. Mastery of this level must involve being able to control the movement of the congenital into the acquired Jing to such a level that the developmental processes of Jing are put into stasis. These beings are still rumoured to live in many of the mountains throughout China and South East Asia, and it seems that many of the local villages in the rural regions of China had 'urban legends' of the immortals of ancient

times still living up in the nearby mountains. On the point of their death, which they choose, the Earthly immortals are said to dissolve into the light of the diamond or rainbow body and move into the immortal realm.

Ghost Immortals

The rather forlorn-sounding 'ghost immortals' are those who have fallen into the path of delusion somewhere in their practices. Although the Xing was taken to the stage of being able to live independently, the practitioner still had acquired bonds to the lower realms of Ming. Upon freeing themselves from the body they became divided from the process of transmigration but ended up being stuck on the Earthly realm rather than being transported up into the immortal realm. They basically then live as a kind of 'light being' which can never move beyond their current attachment to the realm of existence. This is considered something of a mistake in the practice of Nei Dan!

Spirit Immortals

'Spirit immortals' have consolidated their Shen to the point of being able to live independently of the body through mastery of the golden embryo and the practice of the diamond or rainbow body. Despite this, they are only really immortals in that they are separated from the process of transmigration for a very long time. Their Xing and Ming were cultivated to the point of being able to escape the cycle of rebirth, but they never truly opened up the full connection to Dao through the purification of their Xin. They are said to exist within the realm of pure spirit for potentially hundreds of years but then inevitably begin to be drawn back into the cycle of existence once again.

Heavenly Immortals

'Heavenly immortals' are those who are said to have truly attained immortality. They have purified the true consciousness and freed themselves form the bondages of both Xing and Ming. After a long life of vibrant health and wisdom, they fully attain the golden embryo and move into the various layers of the immortal realm, free from the cycle of rebirth. Very few are said to have attained this level of skill.

CONCLUSION

The above discussion of the levels of immortals brings us to an important aspect of alchemical training. Although the mind may be stilled to the point of bringing the spirits in to form the light of Yuan Shen, this does not mean that the acquired mind has been shed. This is an important facet of work that needs to be made clear. This stage of true consciousness is called realization by some, enlightenment by others. Whatever term you choose to apply to this state of being, remember that it really is a stage which can always be taken further. Further exploration and dissolving of the layers of the acquired mind can always be done; allow the light of Yuan Shen to 'burn' through these layers until all that is left is a concept of 'no self'. This is truly a lifetime's work, if not more.

Whether or not you wish to believe these stories is completely up to you. These are the beliefs of the people who put together these systems, but not all members of the Daoist sects agree that these levels of attainment are even possible. Many do not believe in immortals and some do not even believe in the existence of the spirits at all. In my own experience, many aspects of Daoism are not as metaphorical as modern scholars seem to think, but that is only my opinion. An obvious example of this would be many teachers' opinions of what you are working with during alchemical training. To some, 'true silver' and 'true gold' are simply metaphors for different aspects of mind. They state that wisdom arises and that is the stage of attaining the alchemical pill, but I wholeheartedly believe that they have missed the point. For each and every aspect of consciousness there is an energetic resonance and, beyond this still, a spiritual component. It may be true that wisdom is discussed within the alchemical classics, but this is not the level of perception we must attain for Nei Dan practice. We should strive to locate the energetic patterning of wisdom and then go deeper into the spiritual component of this aspect of consciousness. This will then take us to the level of working with the lights that exist at the core of our being. This is the level of true internal alchemy and the gateway to the most fascinating aspects of the Daoist tradition.

Chapter 10

TRANSMISSION TEACHINGS

It is important to note that there are always three parts to any study of an art such as Nei Dan. The first is the hard work and diligence of the practitioner. The second is having adequate information so that you may ensure progress in the correct direction. The third and final part is the role of the teacher. The teacher in Nei Dan serves several purposes, including providing instruction, an example, experiential guidance and possibly assistance from transmission. The level of the teacher will depend in part on their own level of personal attainment but also on their natural ability to be a teacher. Some practitioners are amazingly high-level with regard to their attainment but simply cannot take others to the same place. Conversely, there are great teachers out there who can explain many facets of the arts but have not really attained a high level themselves. You should be careful of these teachers, though, as they may provide technical instruction but not experiential guidance, which can be essential in the case of making, almost inevitable, mistakes.

There is nothing wrong with a teacher who provides only verbal instruction to you because that is enough to guide you along the alchemical process, but those who can and are willing to provide assistance in the form of transmission can be very helpful in your study. Transmission is the mind-to-mind transference of energetic and spiritual information which is absorbed by the student in order to speed up their progress or to help them realize certain stages of the training. Do not be mistaken: transmission is not absolutely required; you can succeed purely through your own practice, but it will be a lot more difficult. Teachers tend to vary between those who openly share transmissions with everybody they teach and those who keep transmissions for only their closer students or those who reach certain milestones. There is no hard and fast rule as to why they do this, although

transmitting information can be tiring on the part of the teacher and this may affect their decision to a large degree.

Within this book on Nei Dan, it seems important to include a section on transmission as it is rarely discussed with regard to its mechanics even though many teachers out there use this method of teaching.

TRANSMISSION METHODS

Direct mind-to-mind transmission is an aspect of meditation that has been a part of its teaching for countless generations. It is the act of passing information psychically straight from the mind of the teacher into the mind of the student. There are many people who find this aspect of the Eastern arts difficult to believe in, but, once experienced, you will understand the usefulness of this form of teaching. Transmission generally comes on one of three different levels – the level of Qi, the level of Shen and the level of emptiness. Qi-based transmission involves the passing of information in the form of energy from one person to another. This is actually happening all of the time when we interact with people on a daily basis, but in the case of transmission this process is heightened considerably. Shen-level transmission takes place at a higher-level frequency range and involves passing information directly from the teacher's consciousness into the student. The highest-level range is that of emptiness, which is a profound level of transmission that I have experienced from only very few teachers.

Qi-Level Transmission Teachings

Qi-level transmission teachings are not actually that uncommon within the internal arts. When a teacher has reached a sufficiently high level, the state of the lower Dan Tien is such that the extension of their energetic field is strong enough that it may pass information into the energy body of another person. This should actually be the case for all experienced Qi Gong teachers, although the degree of refinement of this skill will vary greatly from teacher to teacher. This form of energetic transference can then be utilized in healing modalities such as Qi Gong therapy, whereby the therapist directs their own Qi towards the patient's body, usually through their hand, so that it may improve the state of their internal energy system. Particularly strong therapists in this modality will cause their patients to release stagnant energies in the form of emotional releases or violent bodily spasms. The medical application of this form of transmission is the most common application, although it is also used in other internal arts. In these

cases the teacher will pass energy from their body into the student in order to cause the student's energy to move. This can be used to help a student open up their meridians and free up stagnation within their body.

Often a teacher of Qi Gong or meditation will be doing this without being aware of it because their Qi will permeate the area around them, resulting in movements of energy within the students. I have been to classes where the students were more aware of their teacher's ability to transmit on the Qi level than the teacher was!

There is a great responsibility upon the teacher who has reached this level in their training. This responsibility comes from the fact that the quality of your own Qi will vary greatly, depending upon how you look after yourself. Your Qi contains a form of information and this information will pass directly on to those you are teaching. This was made particularly apparent to me after a delayed long-haul flight resulted in extreme jetlag when I was teaching a small course of more advanced students in the south of the UK. A few hours into the course, the majority of the students had been given all of my symptoms because of the Qi-level transmission taking place in the teaching room. The teaching was severely weakened because the students just wanted to go to sleep. This was not a very dangerous example of how imbalance can be passed on because these symptoms vanished after the students had a good night's sleep, but there are many forms of Qi-level health transmission that can be more problematic. If a teacher neglects to live healthily and then teaches at this level, they will be causing all the students to receive this information. A diet high in sugar, refined food, too much meat and alcohol will make for a particularly bad form of energetic transmission, which runs the risk of causing imbalance in the students of the class. If a student has an inherent weakness in an organ that is negatively affected by these imbalances, then real problems can arise. All teachers should take responsibility for their health, and students should be careful to avoid those teachers who obviously do not look after their own well-being in any way.

No discussion of Qi-level transmission teaching would be complete without mentioning the controversial skill of Ling Kong Jin (凌空勁), or 'empty force' as it is more commonly known. Empty force is the ability to move or knock over another person without any form of contact whatsoever. The teacher waves their hand towards the student from a distance of a few metres and the student will be knocked down or moved uncontrollably in some fashion. This is controversial, mainly because so few believe in it being possible and because it is badly misrepresented in the internal arts community. The reason it is misrepresented is that it is often shown as a

kind of weapon that can be used to disable an attacker from a distance. Invariably, this kind of technique works well on the teacher's students but fails when it is used on a non-compliant attacker. Much embarrassment is then caused as the empty force practitioner usually becomes increasingly well known; finally, somebody turns up and proves quite publicly that it does not work on everybody. This then leads to a misunderstanding where empty force is seen as a kind of hypnosis or something that is fraudulently being acted out by the students.

The truth is that empty force (when done well) is a kind of Qi-level transmission that is very useful for teaching Qi Gong but not so useful in the realm of combat. When Qi information is passed from the teacher to the student through this kind of method, it causes the student's own Qi to begin to move. If they are able to 'tune in' to this kind of level, then their physical body begins to react and be led around by the movement of their energy body. The combination of the level of skill of the empty force practitioner and the level of awareness of the student dictates the success of the skill. I was very curious about empty force when I was younger and so travelled to meet three or four empty force teachers. I learned from them and can now use empty force myself. I will say that, sadly, all but one of these teachers claimed that their empty force could be used as a weapon to stop any attacker. In each case, they were proved wrong, much to the confusion of their students who had placed great trust in their teacher's invincible ability. Why the skill is misrepresented in this way I do not know. For me, it is an amazingly useful tool for helping students to learn how to feel their own energy moving as well as assisting with opening up channels and freeing them of stagnant emotional energies. It is a wonderful therapeutic tool but not a clever weapon. The vast majority of students need to train for at least a few lessons in Nei Gong, Qi Gong or Nei Dan in order for their awareness to reach the level whereby their energy body can 'pick up' the transmission being passed to them. Only around one in four seems to be so naturally receptive to this level of transmission from the outset that they will react strongly to it on their first exposure. This is far more common in women and younger students, who are naturally more sensitive.

The use of empty force as a teaching tool within Qi Gong is great because you can help a student along in their practice, but it should also be used with respect. On more than one occasion I have met students from other teachers who had developed problems from this kind of practice. If

you are going to use this kind of Qi-level transmission, then you are going to change the way in which a person's meridian system works. If you do not have the ability to energetically diagnose the state of a person before you move their Qi around, then you run the risk of creating an unharmonious energetic pattern. This will then probably lead to the development of disease. This is why a study of Chinese medicine was always considered important for those taking the responsibility to teach at this level. Chinese medicine is an aspect of study that all Qi Gong teachers should embark upon in my opinion, even if they do not get to the level of being able to work as a therapeutic practitioner.

The question arises: could practitioners in the past use empty force as a weapon against any attacker? There are certainly many stories of it. In my mind it is quite possible that these practitioners had trained to the level where it was possible, but I have not personally met any in my lifetime. I could not use it as a weapon and have no wish to. For me, it is a useful Qi Gong teaching tool and that is the realm where it should remain.

Shen-Level Transmission Teachings

Qi-level transmission teachings are enough to shift energy around the body, but they are actually inadequate for the majority of stages involved in Nei Dan training. This requires Shen-level transmission methods. Shen-level transmission requires the middle Dan Tien to be cultivated to such a stage that information can be directed upwards from this point and then out via the third-eye region of the head into a student. Some teachers actually use the Heart centre instead of the third-eye region to transmit this level of frequency, but, to be honest, this only really seems adequate to make people in the room feel temporarily happy. Although this type of transmission is fun and feels nice, it is ultimately not as focused towards students' development as it can be.

When Shen-level transmission takes place, it is the movement of the teacher's consciousness that is directed outwards. This can then be picked up by those students who have adequately raised their own frequency of awareness. They are like a radio receiving a signal from the teacher. This happens in various ways, such as the first method shown in Figure 10.1, which is a wave of Shen-level transmission filling the teaching space.



Figure 10.1: Filling a Space with Transmission

In this instance, the teacher expands their own awareness to fill the space within which the teaching is taking place. This 'bubble' of awareness is usually maintained much more easily in a closed-off space, making this method slightly more tricky when practised outdoors. The space filled with transmission then carries the frequency of information that the teacher is transmitting. Anyone sitting within this space begins to pick up the information which is then either translated into something that their own body can understand or discarded if they are not yet able to pick up the level of information being passed to them. The type of information being passed out will really vary depending upon the skill of the teacher. A common method is for the teacher to put their own body into a particular state and transfer this information out into the room so that the students are then naturally lifted up towards the same level of attainment as their teacher. Other methods involve using controlled awareness to put out specific pieces of information that are tailor-made for the students in attendance. A particularly unpleasant transmission, which seems to be quite common among many Nei Dan teachers, involves causing the students' congenital meridians to begin to increase in pressure. This opens the meridians up but causes the whole body to ache as though it is being compressed.

A second method of Shen-based transmission involves directly transferring information from the teacher to the student using focused awareness as shown in Figure 10.2.

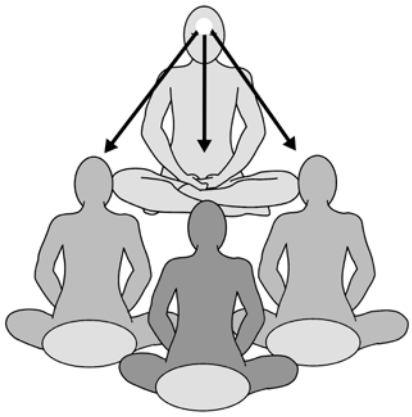


Figure 10.2: Directed Shen Transmission

The Shen-based information transmission is usually, but not always, transferred out from the third-eye region of the teacher towards the students. This form of transmission can be specifically targeted towards individuals in the room, meaning that teachings can be held back from certain students or saved for those who are at a high enough stage to understand them. This is a common way for specific teachings to be held for those students who are considered 'inner door', which means that they have been selected by the teacher to have no information held back from them. These people are usually considered to be the seniors within a given school.

The third main form of Shen-based transmission is commonly known as 'channelling', and it is shown in Figure 10.3.

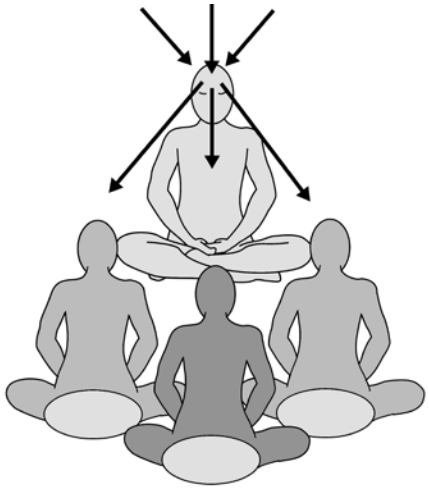


Figure 10.3: Channelling Transmission

This process requires the teacher to have reached a high enough level whereby their own consciousness has touched upon the frequencies of the spiritual realm. The teacher is both a receiver and a transmitter of information from higher stages of awareness down through their own body and then out into the students. This 'channelled' information is then either passed on through mind-to-mind transmission or often through verbal instruction, often in the form of information that the teacher is not privy to themselves. In this case, the information is speaking through them to the students. Sometimes the teacher will perceive an entity or spirit talking through them, but in actual fact this is not often the case. In many instances the teacher's mind is receiving information which their own mind then converts into a form that is easy for the acquired mind to understand. That translates the information being received into a spirit 'talking' through them. This is a high-level form of teaching which I have only encountered a few times in my life. This is a rare ability. The ability to do this does not seem to be 'system-specific'; the person I have met with the strongest ability to do this was a teacher in South East Asia, while the second most able was definitely a woman I met in Mid Wales, UK.

As with Qi-level transmission, there is a certain degree of integrity required of those using Shen-level information transmission. Although physical imbalance does not pass across in the same way, emotional imbalance does. In ancient China, when students were selected and taken into the practices that helped to develop Shen-level transmission, they were often chosen on the strength of their perceived character. Those with a tendency towards emotional swings were not selected because their instabilities could easily be passed on to students. Even the most diligent student would still not be taken to this level if they were unable to maintain a clear mind, free from emotional extremes, for the vast majority of the time. This was because emotionally based transmission can be negative with regard to the health of the receiving student. Too much emotionally based transmission will begin to 'fry' the mind of the student and some damage can be irreparable.

A second danger exists because Shen-level transmission involves direct mind-to-mind contact between the teacher and the student. This kind of work involves a level of psychological intimacy that quickly develops into a very strong feeling of trust from the student to the teacher. A true teacher will then not misuse this trust in any way, whereas a less scrupulous teacher might use this trust in order to take advantage of the student. This almost inevitably involves the handing over of large sums of money or the

sexual exploitation of students, which is hugely common in many schools. A teacher should always be striving to be as virtuous a person as possible in respect of their dealings with others. I am sure that most teachers do not seek to take advantage of their students, but for many the temptation must become too much when they receive the level of trust that comes with Shen-based teachings. As a student, you should look at the moral behaviour of your teacher closely and ask if this is the kind of teacher you wish to learn from.

Emptiness-Level Transmission Teachings

Those teachers who have reached very high levels in their practice are able to transmit pure emptiness out into the space around them. These teachers often emit a feeling of extreme calmness around them which is easy to pick up on. Just sitting in the vicinity of one of these teachers will result in feelings of shifting into the Wuji state. These teachers are very rare and never live in society. Invariably, you will have to climb mountains and visit temples in order to locate these teachers. Students will often travel hundreds of miles across the planet just to sit with these teachers, sometimes for days at a time. Although this is useful to experience, it should also be noted that there often develops a sense of dependency around such a teacher. The students become so addicted to their teacher's transmission that a cult quickly develops around them – usually against the teacher's wishes. I would urge you to try to experience these teachers at least once in your life if you are able, but remember that becoming addicted to any experience will stop further development, and this includes becoming overly attached to the emptiness transmissions of high-level meditation teachers.

The above discussion of transmission has been a broad overview. In addition to these methods, you may encounter countless others. One other important method is the empowerment of Mudras, which was briefly discussed in Chapter 4. This is the process of a teacher transmitting conscious information into a hand shape so that whenever you use it in your practice it starts up a process or moves energy in a specific manner. This is the only way that high-level Mudras can be learned, and I have seen similar types of transmission being used to empower weapons or objects and even Chinese calligraphy. I do not fully understand the workings of this kind of transmission, but it seems to involve imprinting the information of the teacher and those before them into the physical realm through the target

Mudra or object. This kind of transmission tends to be given out quite sparingly as it can be very tiring for the teacher; empowered objects are still highly sought-after items in the Far East, with particularly old ones exchanging hands for extremely large amounts of money.

REVERSE TRANSMISSION AND THE STATE OF HUMILITY

As stated above, there are teachers of different levels in the world of the internal arts. Some may teach verbally, whereas others have reached varying states of attainment that enable them to transmit. Each of these teachers has their place in the world of the internal arts and much can be learned from good teachers in each of these categories. Those wishing to maximize this learning should understand the relationship between the mental state of humility and the act of reverse transmission.

In the discussion of humility in Chapter 3 of this book, I stated that humility creates a type of vacuum within the spirit. Each and every mental state has its own energetic quality, and humility is one of the most powerful when studying Nei Dan or indeed any of the internal arts. Those who can be truly humble in their core will generate an energetic 'space' within which information will flow. Energy always wishes to move from an area of high pressure to an area of low pressure. When humility is generated inside the practitioner, this vacuum draws towards it spiritual information which nourishes the sincere student. This process is heightened when a student can be humble before their teacher; if the teacher is willing to impart their teachings, then the energy will flow openly from the teacher into the student. Much of this information will move into the subconscious mind of the student, meaning that the teachings take place beyond the realm of words or even conscious transmission. The balance between the openness of the teacher and the humility of the student results in a flow of energetic teachings which cannot be easily stopped. In this case, it is almost inevitable that the student will be taken deep into the process they are trying to learn. In ancient times, this whole process of learning was well understood within the East and was summed up in the phrase 'empty your cup'. Many have incorrectly thought that this means you should forget all prior learning when you go to a new teacher so that the 'cup' of your mind is free from unhelpful comparisons, but this is not actually true. The saying means to create emptiness within the self through the mental state of humility so that the space can be filled once more. This is also alluded

to in many Daoist texts, including the writings of Laozi, who expounded at great length on the importance of having an 'emptiness' inside.

There are various difficulties here, though. First, humility cannot be forced upon yourself. If you try to be humble, you just create false humility, which is a very common facet of human nature. False humility is often a mask for arrogance, hidden by a verbal expression of humility. To become humble you must understand that being humble is a very scary thing. Humility opens up the core of your being to the outside world, which leaves the acquired mind feeling extremely vulnerable. This feeling of insecurity then causes the acquired mind to try to strengthen itself through building more layers, more pieces of projected, emotionally based untruth, behind which the true self hides. Each and every time you have been hurt, made to feel small or stepped on by another, you have probably moved yourself further from a state of humility. It is for this reason that the early stages of any internal practice should really be to free yourself from as many tethers to the acquired mind as you can. By purging these emotional imbalances, your mind begins to feel more secure and therefore humility does not seem so scary a state of being. The vacuum opens and then the 'cup has been emptied'. Only at this stage can true teachings really be absorbed. Humility cannot be forced; it is a state of being that will grow naturally once the right level has been reached. This is a highly relieving state to reach – akin to a breath of fresh air for the mind. It is said that 'when the student is ready, the teacher will appear', and I believe this time is when humility is beginning to blossom within the student's Heart.

A second difficulty comes from the fact that humility from the student must also be matched by humility from the teacher, together with an openness to teaching. A student's humility met by a closed-off teacher will usually result in an imbalance of trust, which then leads to abuse occurring somewhere along the line. The teacher must be open to imparting information and humble to the higher powers of existence; otherwise, transmission of the method will not take place to the required degree.

From this you can see that there are so many potential pitfalls in the teacher–student relationship! I have been stung many times over the years from imbalances on both the side of the student and of the teacher. In some cases, I was not ready for the teacher and my insecurity prevented me from receiving their teachings; in other cases, although I was open to receiving, the teacher was not open to sharing the information. This is all a part of the personal journey we are on, though, and sometimes 'negative'

experiences can be as useful as 'positive' ones, providing we are not too damaged by them.

CONCLUSION

I will end this section of the book by saying that it is important to remember that nothing should ever be forced. This is a golden rule for almost every aspect of Daoism and indeed life itself. Forcing generates the potential for mental resistance, which in turn creates the likelihood of stagnation. Never force yourself to practise Nei Dan; be sincere and allow the practice to unfold naturally for you. If it is the 'right' thing for you to do, then you will find that any barriers, either mental or practical, seem to fade away and you will be led deep into the study of Daoist alchemy. Before long you will find that sitting becomes one of the most pleasant aspects of your life and you will then be led deep into the process I have outlined here.

As stated at the beginning of this book, the idea behind writing about Nei Dan in this way was to try to give the reader a practical guide based upon my own and others' experiences of the various stages of attainment. Although I cannot discuss beyond the beginner and intermediate stages of training due to my own limitations, I hope that some find this book useful. I am still practising myself and developing every day. It is my hope that some reading this book are inspired to go deep into the practice, that some may look out high-level teachers around the world and that some will feel they are able to add to the growing collection of written work on Nei Dan in the West. It is still a virtually unexplored topic in this part of the world with regard to both practice and written theory. I have faith that this will begin to change as more and more people seem to be drawn to the alchemy of the enigmatic Daoists with each passing day.

The final two chapters of this book look at the related subject of *Yi Jing* divination, which I believe is an important part of any budding alchemist's training.

Chapter 11

UNDERSTANDING THE *YI JING*

Usually in my books I try to include a set of Qi Gong exercises to go with the theory. I originally intended to include a set of moving exercises that would complement Nei Dan training, but I decided they would detract too much from the alchemical process. Instead, as an adjunct to the exercises in this book, I decided to include an introduction to usage of the *Yi Jing*, which is more commonly written as the *I Ching*. The *Yi Jing* consists of the Gua, ancient symbols which appear time after time in alchemical scripture and artwork. The Gua can convey great amounts of information to those who understand their arcane meaning. On top of this, regular work with the *Yi Jing* helps to shift your perception of reality as it engages the mind in an abstract and circular fashion. It is for this reason that I advise all practitioners of Nei Dan to begin to use the *Yi Jing* in their daily life. The more you can get in touch with the ebbs and flows of the 'background information' that dictate the movements of reality, the more likely you will be to pierce through the layers of acquired mind to touch the root of the alchemical pill.

INTRODUCTION TO THE *YI JING*

It is an important aspect of any Daoist study that we manage to integrate theory and practice. One must feed the other. If we engage with a study such as the *Yi Jing* purely intellectually, then the wrong part of our consciousness will be engaged. If we do not embrace the theory, then our intellect is not engaged at all, and this is equally wrong. It is when intellectual understanding and experiential knowledge come together that true wisdom is found. For this reason, we must begin with an exploration of the theory of the *Yi Jing* before moving on to its actual usage.

The *Yi Jing* is one of if not *the* most important classical text to come out of China. Passed down through oral traditions for thousands of years, it was eventually recorded in writing, preserving a mathematical and philosophical system of divination created by an enlightened ancient culture. Through study of the *Yi Jing* it is possible to glimpse through a window in time to understand the levels of profound comprehension that China's ancient ancestors had reached. Far from primitive people with little understanding of the world they lived in, the ancient Chinese clearly understood more about the wider cosmos than we do now. Through the creation of the *Yi Jing* they had recorded a way to fathom the various vibrational frequencies that make up the fabric of existence and then divine exactly how these different frequencies interplay with one another to create our experience of the passage of time. All this was taking place some ten thousand years ago and probably more; the absence of written records from this time makes it difficult to place an exact date upon the creation of these teachings.

Yi Jing can be translated as meaning 'the classical text of the nature of change'. Figure 11.1 shows the Chinese characters of *Yi Jing*.



Figure 11.1: Yi Jing

The *Yi Jing* is concerned with understanding how change takes place on the three levels of spirit, energy and physicality. It is generally understood to be a method of divining the nature of a current or future event, which is its most common use in modern times. This, however, is only one of its many functions. The *Yi Jing* was originally applied to such fields as astrology, politics and even medicine, where its codified symbols enabled medical scholars to glimpse into the very workings of the energy body accessed through such practices as acupuncture and Qi Gong. Scholars from the Buddhist, Daoist and Confucian traditions – and, apparently, Confucius himself – studied it extensively. One of the most detailed commentaries on the hidden meanings of the symbols in the *Yi Jing* was left to us by

Confucius who is recorded to have wished that he had a chance to start his life over in order to study this sublime text in more detail.

The *Yi Jing* comprises eight key symbols known as trigrams or Gua. These eight key symbols are formed of combinations of either solid or broken lines representing the two great poles of Yang and Yin. It is through the study of these eight Gua that the nature of change is understood. These eight key symbols appear throughout Chinese culture and history in architecture, classical paintings and within philosophical texts, demonstrating the widespread study of the *Yi Jing* throughout the ages. Curiously, these symbols did not just appear in ancient China but also in different cultures throughout the world. The ancient Mayans have artwork featuring similar symbols to the eight Gua, as do some Egyptian carvings. They even appear in Europe. Seven thousand years ago a man, recently dubbed 'Otzi', was stabbed in the back while making his way across the Alps. His body was frozen and preserved, allowing archaeologists to study a body from this era that was in relatively good condition. Covering Otzi's body were 57 different lines and symbols marking key meridian points classically indicated for digestive and rheumatic conditions, together with several Gua from the *Yi Jing*. The widespread understanding and use of the *Yi Jing* (as well as worldwide use of meridian theory) shows the impact that these ancient teachings had upon the world and the degree to which ancient cultures shared these teachings.

Exact historical information on the founder of the *Yi Jing* is impossible to come by; ancient Chinese history is often mixed in with mythology, and key historical figures are often credited with the creation of anything that came out of their era. Despite this, there are several different stories or accounts which may hold some truth. Generally, the original formation of the *Yi Jing* and the eight Gua is said to lie with a legendary figure named Fu Xi (伏羲). Fu Xi was said to be a philosopher ruler who governed a large area of ancient China with great wisdom. In ancient times it is said that the world was ruled by deep thinkers and enlightened sages rather than the political warmongers who are in charge of things now. In addition, Fu Xi was also half dragon and more than seven feet tall! His heritage lay in the Heavens from whence the dragons had descended and taught the ancient Chinese many of their wisdom traditions. According to classical Chinese history, all of their rulers had been half dragon right up until their last emperors and empresses. Fu Xi is said to have created the *Yi Jing* several thousand years ago after seeing the symbols in his mind's eye while deep in meditation. The symbols he perceived were the eight key

Gua which would go on to lay the root for the formation of the entire *Yi Jing* philosophy.

The nature of these eight symbols was studied for a long period of time until roughly 1500 BC when the symbols were recorded in writing. In these writings it is clear to see how the eight key Gua had been studied and combined into 64 further symbols which showed their interplays and relationships. Records from this time show that use of the *Yi Jing* revolved solely around the study of these eight key foundation symbols and the further 64 interplays. There was no commentary as is to be found in modern translations of the *Yi Jing* as these came much later. Study revolved purely around interpretation of the patterns formed from the solid and broken lines of the key symbols. Figure 11.2 shows the eight key symbols of the *Yi Jing* and the further 64 symbols born from them.

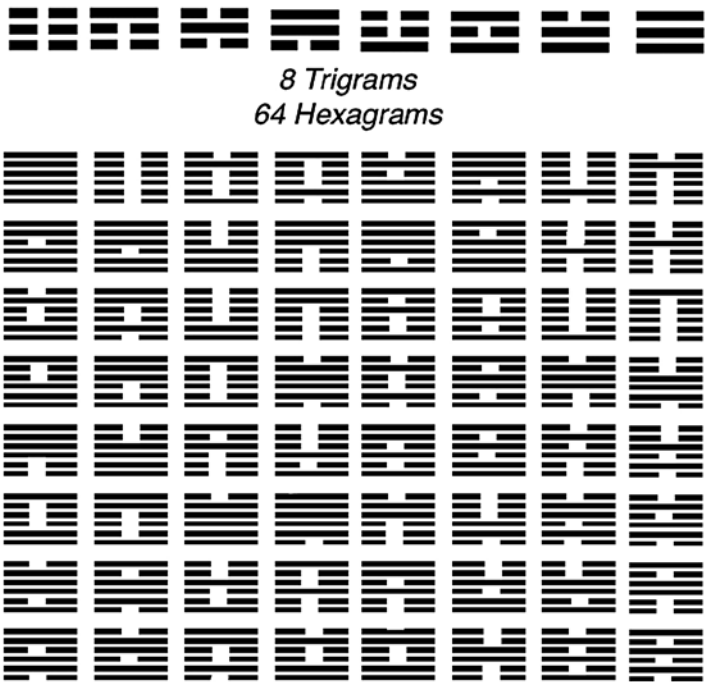


Figure 11.2: The Eight Trigrams and the 64 Hexagrams

From now on I will refer to the symbols collectively as Gua; the eight key 'three-line' symbols will be identified as trigrams and the 64 'six-line' symbols will be identified as hexagrams.

This original method of studying the symbols of the *Yi Jing* is known as the Fu Xi method. It involves a combination of energetic practices and

symbolic imagery to divine information from deep within the stillness of one's true consciousness. Through the symbolic language of the Gua we are able to use this method to train our intuitive mind to draw information directly from that part of our own mind that truly understands the nature of existence. In short, it is a way of training our mind to be wise.

Roughly a thousand years after written records of the *Yi Jing* started to appear, another key character in the history of the classical texts made an appearance. His name is King Wen (周文王). King Wen was not actually a king; this was an honorary term bestowed on him after his death because of the profound contribution he made to the development of the *Yi Jing* and therefore Chinese culture. Records vary greatly as to what King Wen's role actually was and these accounts vary between him being a state official through to a meditating hermit and even a long-term political prisoner who developed his study of the *Yi Jing* while locked away in a dungeon. Whatever the truth, King Wen is accredited with adding the first lines of commentary to the symbols of the *Yi Jing*. With the addition of written teachings to the *Yi Jing*, it was no longer necessary to comprehend the Gua intuitively in order to access innate wisdom; here was an external, theoretical way in which to understand them. These first writings on the Gua are often known as the 'judgements' on the key lines. They consist of small verses which give a somewhat cryptic explanation of the nature of each of the trigrams and hexagrams. Many of these descriptions are very alchemical in nature, showing the strong connection King Wen must have had to the Daoist Nei Dan tradition.

King Wen had a son named the Duke of Chou (周公), also an honorary title given to him after his death. The Duke of Chou expanded upon his father's writings to create commentaries on each of the changing lines of the Gua. Now that this process was complete, every aspect of the *Yi Jing* had its own commentary and explanatory writings. This saw a great shift in the use of the *Yi Jing* from a classical method of accessing the intuitive mind to a method of understanding an event using the intellectual mind. These two methods became known respectively as the Fu Xi and the King Wen method, or the congenital and the acquired method.

Many great thinkers, including Confucius, then added further commentaries and it is these commentaries that you will normally find in English-language translations of the *Yi Jing*. Different translations feature different scholars' commentaries.

When looking at the two different methods, which I shall refer to as the congenital and the acquired methods, it is clear to see that one is more

advanced than the other. Although both require an understanding of the development and layout of the *Yi Jing*, only one requires an experiential understanding of the nature of Gua; the other method simply requires the ability to be able to read and ponder over the commentaries provided. It is generally wise to begin with what is easiest and so it is usual to begin with the acquired method of using the *Yi Jing* before attempting to learn the congenital method. This chapter is concerned with the acquired method of *Yi Jing* interpretation as I believe continued practice of the *Yi Jing* acquired method and Nei Dan will naturally lead a diligent practitioner into the congenital method.

The general process for learning the use of the Yi Jing is as follows:

- *Learning to understand the underlying philosophy and theory of the* Yi Jing. This involves understanding its formation, the interactions of Yin and Yang and its connection to the flow of Ming which affects each and every one of us throughout the course of our daily life.

- *Learning to use the classical yarrow stalks method for finding the Gua pertinent to the reading you are taking.* Note that in modern times there are two key methods of taking a *Yi Jing* reading. The first uses the tossing of coins so that the combination of heads and tails produces each of the Gua. The coin method is essentially flawed because it does not take into account the power of numerology which is highly important in use of the *Yi Jing*. It also does not take into account that some Gua should be more likely to appear than others. The coin method places an equal chance on each Gua and so will produce the wrong readings. If you currently use the coin method to take *Yi Jing* readings, I would suggest you stop and learn the yarrow stalk method instead.

- *Learning how to read the* Yi Jing *using the acquired method of consulting the book to read the commentaries of King Wen and the Duke of Chou.* Once you have managed to understand *Yi Jing* usage to this stage, you have completed the acquired method of using the *Yi Jing*. This stage is fairly simple and can be learned quite quickly. Progression beyond this stage involves moving into the congenital method.

- *Learning to intuitively divine an understanding of the nature of change through delving deep enough into the* Yi Jing *symbols that they begin to permeate through to the core of your consciousness.* This requires having successfully integrated the eight key energies into your very being.

This is a high level of *Yi Jing* usage coming purely from the congenital Fu Xi method. At this stage there is no need for yarrow stalk usage or any external method as the cosmos will give you the information required for intuitive understanding of the nature of change. I believe that reaching this stage also requires deep practice of Nei Dan to help your consciousness elevate itself to the correct state.

THE FORMATION OF THE *YI JING*

The mathematical layout of the *Yi Jing* is based on the theory of the process of creation. It is this theory that was then absorbed into Daoism, giving birth to all of the later theories and practices that came from this tradition. This is the theory discussed in Chapter 1 of this book and in my previous book *Daoist Nei Gong: The Philosophical Art of Change*. This theory will now be revisited here from the perspective of the creation of the *Yi Jing*. The theory basically states that from an initial point of extreme stillness, known as Wuji, there was a spark of movement that gave birth to existence. This initial point of movement created division within the original stillness that existed prior to creation; the result of this division was the birth of the two poles known as Yin and Yang. As soon as Yin and Yang came into existence, there was the possibility of movement between two extremes, and thus the potential for life, form and movement was laid in place. This process is generally indicated with the image shown in Figure 11.3.

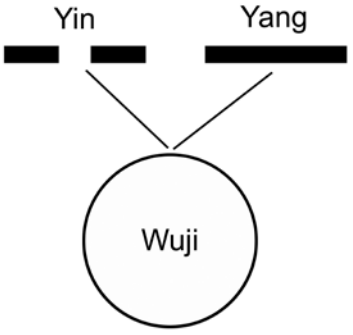


Figure 11.3: The Birth of Yin and Yang

Within *Yi Jing* theory, Yin is indicated with a broken line and Yang is indicated with a solid line as shown. The stillness of Wuji is represented

by an empty circle. When reading the various diagrams and the lines of the Gua, we work our way from the bottom to the top.

Yin and Yang theory is easily the most discussed theory to come out of China. Even those with no interest or understanding of Daoism are likely to be familiar with the terms and the famous Taiji symbol showing the cyclical interaction of Yin and Yang. Philosophically, Yin and Yang are the two extremes sometimes known as the feminine (Yin) and the masculine (Yang). Everything in existence is thus an expression of these two poles and how they interact with each other.

The process of creation continues as Yin and Yang further subdivide into four constituent parts. The next stage would be the division shown in Figure 11.4.

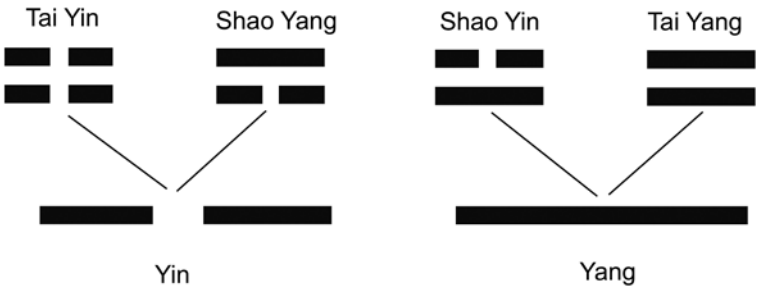


Figure 11.4: The Four Great Powers

These four are known as Tai Yin (太陰) (greater Yin), Shao Yang (少陽) (lesser Yang), Shao Yin (少陰) (lesser Yin) and Tai Yang (太陽) (greater Yang). In Daoist cosmology they are known as the four great powers and are said to be the four key energetic imprints that govern the different ways in which Yin and Yang can react with each other. Essentially, they show the following four qualities of Yin and Yang interaction:

- *Tai Yin* – This is the greatest possible manifestation of the force of Yin. The process from bottom to top shows Yin moving upwards and remaining true to its form. It is supported by itself and manifesting Yi in its purest form.
- *Shao Yang* – Remember that reading anything in the *Yi Jing* begins from the bottom, so this symbol shows Yin converting into Yang. As it is Yang at its culmination, it is essentially more masculine in nature but its roots are weak since it is founded upon the uncertainty of

change from its opposite pole. For this reason it is known as lesser Yang.

- *Shao Yin* – Although this symbol begins as Yang in nature, it transforms to culminate in the force of Yin. Since it is based upon its opposite pole and not rooted in itself, it is not as strong as it could be, so it is known as lesser Yin.
- *Tai Yang* – This is the greatest possible manifestation of Yang. The process of its development shows stability rather than any form of change, meaning that it is Yang at its root and Yang at its culmination. The strength of this symbol gives it the name greater Yang.

These four different interactions of Yin and Yang form the basis of all further ways in which these two poles can be combined. Any individual part of any Gua can only be made up of one of these four symbols whether they are identified as separate or overlapping parts as shown in Figure 11.5.

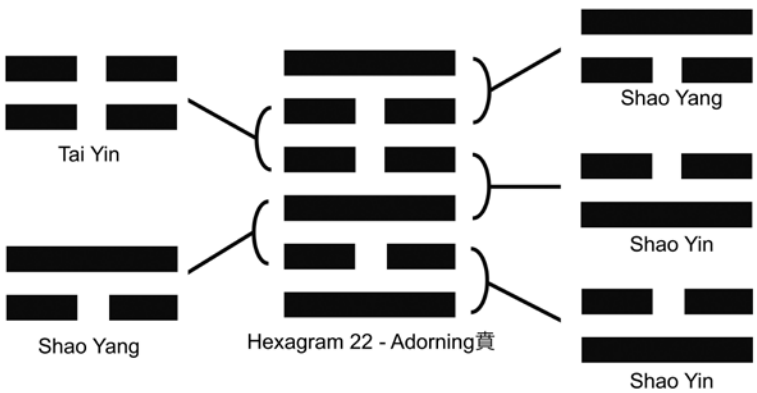


Figure 11.5: The Four Great Powers within a Gua

Looking at the hexagram shown in Figure 11.5, we can see that it is formed of five individual points where Yin and Yang convert into each other. Where these points meet, one of the four great powers is manifest. At a later stage in your understanding of the *Yi Jing*, this gives you the ability to analyse the relative stability and comparative qualities of each stage of the change process inherent within each Gua. These four key symbols can be equated with the four gross elements of Buddhism, which are also said to form the basis for existence. Within Buddhism they are known as Fire, Water, Air and Earth.

These four symbols represent the possibility for existence, but they are not manifest as existence itself. This only takes place when another level of Yin and Yang subdivision takes place, as shown in Figure 11.6.

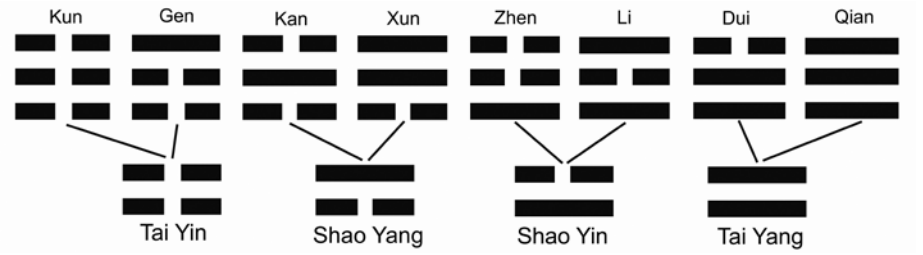


Figure 11.6: The Creation of the Ba Gua

The result of this next stage of division is the creation of the eight key symbols known as the Ba Gua (八卦). These eight symbols comprise three lines representing the three treasures of human life: Heaven, Earth and man. The lower line represents the energy of Earth, the top line represents the influence of Heaven, and the middle line represents humankind living between these two forces. These are the three ingredients that make up human life as we know it. Our bodies are nurtured and fed by the force and gifts of the Earth while our minds are influenced by the movements of Heaven. The Ba Gua show us the different ways in which Yin and Yang can interact with each other to create life and all the processes inherent within it. Once the process of creation has reached this stage, existence has come into being.

This is the process of creation which then went on to form the basic theory for most Daoist internal practices including Qi Gong, Nei Gong and Nei Dan. In most practices aiming at elevating the stage of a practitioner's consciousness, it is this process that is being worked with. Generally, this means locating the energies within the body inherent at each stage in this creation process and 'reversing the process' in order to return to the stage of stillness from which this process initially began. The entire process is mapped out in various ways using different symbols, but within *Yi Jing* theory it would be mapped out as shown in Figure 11.7.

This shows the development from the extreme stillness of Wuji through to the point of existence shown by the eight key symbols of the Ba Gua. If we can understand this process of development, then we can understand much of the foundation theory that gave birth to the practice of divination using the *Yi Jing*.

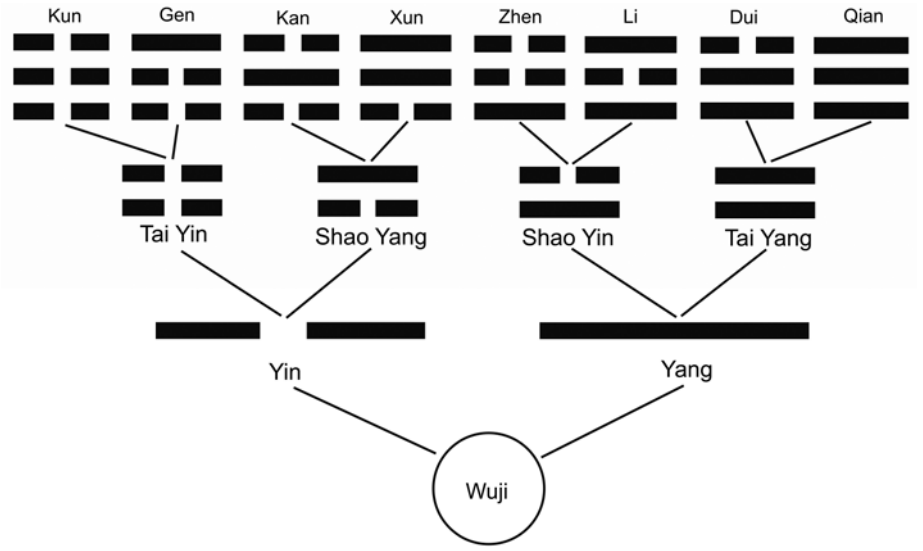


FIGURE 11.7: THE *YI JING* CREATION PROCESS

At the final stage of creation we are left with eight key symbols which represent eight forms of Qi – energetic information. This energetic information takes the form of a wave which lays the energetic root for an event or occurrence within the cosmos. Every action that takes place between the realms of Heaven and Earth is dependent upon the shifting movements of these eight key energies and how they overlay on to each other. The eight symbols give us the nature of existence, and then, when they are combined, we get the nature of time and the manner in which it passes. To the ancient Daoists, time, energy and form were essentially one and the same; one could not exist apart from the other two. The different manner in which time can exist is exemplified within the two key forces of Yin and Yang. When we cast the *Yi Jing* and create two hexagrams, we are essentially getting a diagrammatic representation of the way in which energy/information is unfolding at any one point in time. The hexagram shows a six-part image of time unfolding from the past through into the present moment and then further on into the future. This process of past to future is read from the base of the hexagram up towards the top of the hexagram, with the centre point being the nature of the present moment being explored.

Each individual part of the process unfolding is indicated with an individual line that is either Yin (broken) or Yang (solid). Yin represents a slowing down of the movement of time and energy, while Yang shows the

speeding up of time and energy. It is an important facet of Daoist philosophy that time is not a fixed entity which cannot change; it is something that is constantly in a state of flux. Time and change can either speed up or slow down depending upon their nature and the way in which we are interacting with them. This is because time is simply a form of energy to the Daoists, and energy has to be either Yin or Yang. Time only exists, along with energy and matter, because of the element of consciousness. It is the involvement of consciousness at any given moment that begins to change the way in which time unfolds. Without consciousness there would be no time, which in turn means that there would be no energy or even matter. Existence itself depends upon the involvement of mind. This gives the person willing to actively participate in the unfolding of an event through the study of the nature of the passing of energy/time a lot of power because they have the potential to change it. This was the main reason for the acquired use of the *Yi Jing*.

A Yin quality to a moment of time shows a slowing down towards stillness, whereas a Yang movement shows a shift up in gear. Interestingly, the ancient Daoists stated that Yang was closer to the energy of Heaven and had an upwards movement, while Yin was closer to Earth and involved a sinking of energy towards the planet. This means that time moves more slowly when it is linked to the planet and faster when it is up away from the planet into the Heavens. Scientists are also discovering the same. Time is very much dependent on the strength of gravitational fields as well as the speed at which something is travelling. Essentially, this means that a person living close to the gravitational pull of Earth would actually age much more slowly than a person who was living further from the planet. Cutting-edge scientific discovery is often stumbling upon concepts long understood by the 'primitive' people of the ancient world. Daoism goes one step further and states that those able to engage with the passing of time will find it moves more slowly if the mental activity of the mind is slowed down. The closer we can bring ourselves to stillness, the more slowly time will pass for us – a realization that enabled high-level Daoists to enter states of complete stasis for long periods of time and demonstrate great feats of longevity.

When the Ba Gua combine with each other, they give us the various different properties of the passing of time. These different properties are represented by the symbols shown in Figure 11.8.

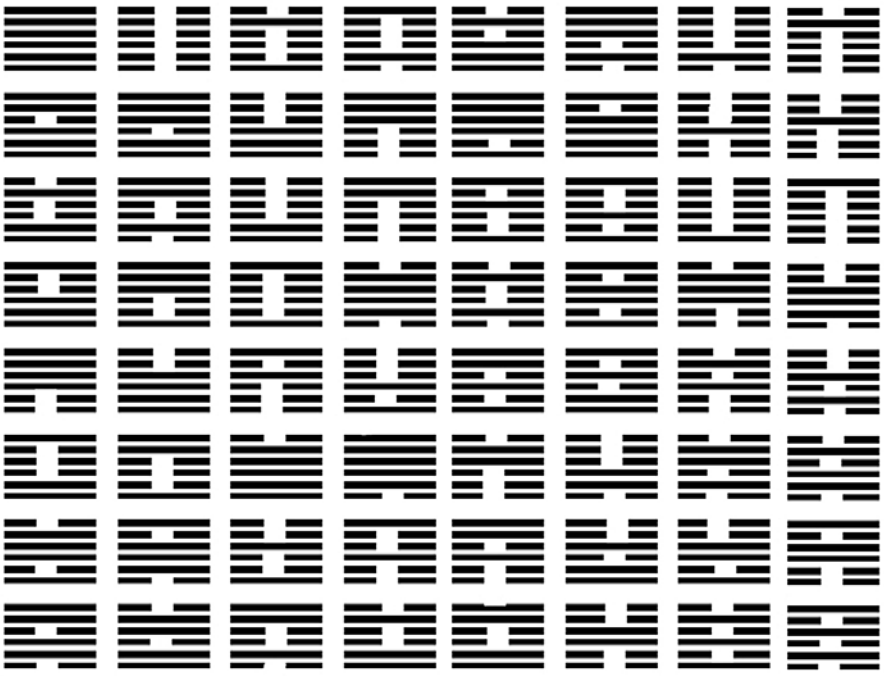


Figure 11.8: The 64 Hexagrams

These 64 symbols show the different ways in which time can unfold over the course of an event. They show the different ways in which the past can turn into the present, which then generates a future outcome. It shows all of the possible interactions of Yin and Yang, the four great powers and the Ba Gua. In short, it is a comprehensive window on to the nature of existence and how we are experiencing it at any given time. Contained within each of the hexagrams is the profound lesson that, although we are studying the passing of time and how the past can generate a future outcome, there really is no time. There is past or future, and there is only a continually evolving sequence of present moments within which we are living. It is our mind that creates the illusion of the passing of time because it causes us to hold on to past events or yearn for future outcomes. Each of the six lines of any hexagram represents one of these present moments which is, in essence, only either Yin or Yang in nature. This is the ultimate nature of everything. When we see all of these individual moments as an illusion of the passing of time, this idea of everything being either pure Yin or Yang is lost in a blur; this is shown by the various combined symbols made up of multiple lines. Gaining divine insight within our life generally requires that we are able to slip into mental stillness so that the passing of time dissolves in front

of us, leaving us solely with an experience of the present moment. This truth is often diagrammatically represented by a hexagram sitting within a circle as shown in Figure 11.9.



Figure 11.9: The Illusion of Time

Each of the six lines in this symbol represents a single moment in time, while the circle containing the six lines represents the stillness of Wuji. Between each single moment is complete stillness if only we can access it. It is the confused activity of our own mind that disturbs this stillness and blurs the individual moments into the illusion of time passing.

OUR EXPERIENCE OF TIME

While the wisdom traditions of the East state that time itself is an illusion and the nature of existence is ultimately emptiness, they would not state that believing otherwise is negative. While the passing of time and the existence of the physical realm is a falsity created within our own mind, it is a useful illusion. It enables us to live, carry out our life, have experiences and interact with others. The illusion is a great place to exist for the majority of people, although it has its ups and downs. The Daoist view is that it is this false world that enables us to learn lessons and develop our inner self; it only becomes a problem when we become too caught up within it and it becomes our sole focus. When the false reality stops being a series of experiences to further our own internal development, we can begin to move smoothly along the path of our Ming.

The passing of time and the events that take place within this line is known as our Ming in Daoism. Often this word is translated as meaning our 'fate' or our 'destiny', but these are a little off of the mark. Our Ming is the nature of the course of our existence as we move from birth to death. It is the nature of the ebb and flow of the energies and events that we

experience as we move along this line. According to Daoism, some of our Ming is very set as these are the experiences deemed useful for us to have according to the divine will of Heaven. Other events are fluid in nature and will be either difficult or easy for us depending upon how well we manage to flow along with the natural course of the Ming. If we buck against what is happening for us, then these events can be difficult as we try to impose our own will over the will of Heaven.

If we wanted to represent the passing of time along the line of our Ming, we could show it diagrammatically as in Figure 11.10.

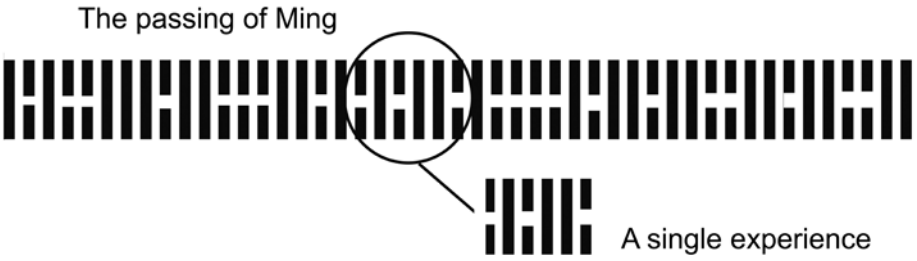


Figure 11.10: The Passing of Ming

The stream of lines shows the passing of our Ming represented by Yin and Yang lines. This continuous stream of moments, represented by lines, would stretch out from our birth and on towards our death – and theoretically beyond. Circled within this line is a single moment, experience or event that is unfolding upon this line. Here it is taken out and isolated as six key lines which would make up the process of the illusion of the near past moving into the present and then unfolding into the near future. This is how the *Yi Jing* works; it enables us to divine the nature of our Ming's flow and ascertain which hexagram applies to the current experience we are having. This symbol is then considered in isolation, when in fact it is part of a much larger stream of passing moments. From this way of looking at the nature of the passing of time, it is clear to see how each event is actually an integral part of the next. The hexagram, which was isolated from the larger collection of Yin and Yang lines above, would form part of the next hexagram and in the same way is formed of parts of the previous hexagram. This is the interconnected nature of life.

The different nature of the Yin and Yang lines stacked on top of one another in the forming of a hexagram shows us one of the other great truths about time: it is subject to change. Time is simply a form of energy

to the Daoists, and energy is fluid in nature. The metaphor regularly used for understanding energy is the metaphor of water. Water ebbs and flows around obstacles. It reacts to its environment and changes according to its circumstances. This flexibility within the properties of water made it a very important element for the Daoists and much study was given over to the nature of water in the wider environment. Time is an energy form and energy can be changed; this means that we can alter the way in which an event unfolds. We can change an unfolding event so that it becomes beneficial for our own growth or the growth of others, and avoid making mistakes that would make our flow of Ming difficult. We do this essentially by changing the circumstances surrounding an event, which may be environmental in nature or simply a change of mindset since energy is only experienced due to an interaction with our consciousness anyway.

It is an important part of Daoism that consciousness, energy and matter are mutually dependent upon one another. Understood through the interactions of the San Bao, the Daoists saw that each had the ability to transform into another, once again conforming to the rule of change that permeates the universe. Each of these three also has to be rooted in the other, meaning that consciousness must be rooted in energy, which has to be rooted in the physical realm, and vice versa. Like three overlaid frequencies, each exists within the same place at the same time. Since time is a form of energy, it has to be rooted in something physical, and to the ancient Daoists this was within the tissues of our physical body. Our body manifests the passing of the energy of time throughout the course of our Ming causing us to age and develop. They believed that an overly active quality to the process of change taking place within our Ming would cause us to age faster as it became more Yang in nature. The more Yin and gentle we could make our relationship to the process of change taking place within our Ming, the more slowly we would age. This truth can be seen in the bodily processes that take hold of people when they are experiencing periods of great stress in their life. The difficulty of the flow of their Ming, or rather their reaction to this flow, leads to hair turning grey, wrinkles forming and energy levels depleting.

Interestingly, when the eight key symbols of the Ba Gua are combined into the 64 hexagrams and mapped out in a circle as shown in Figure 11.11, they match the layout of the 64 codons formed from the eight key amino acids that make up our DNA. See the similarities shown in Figure 11.11.

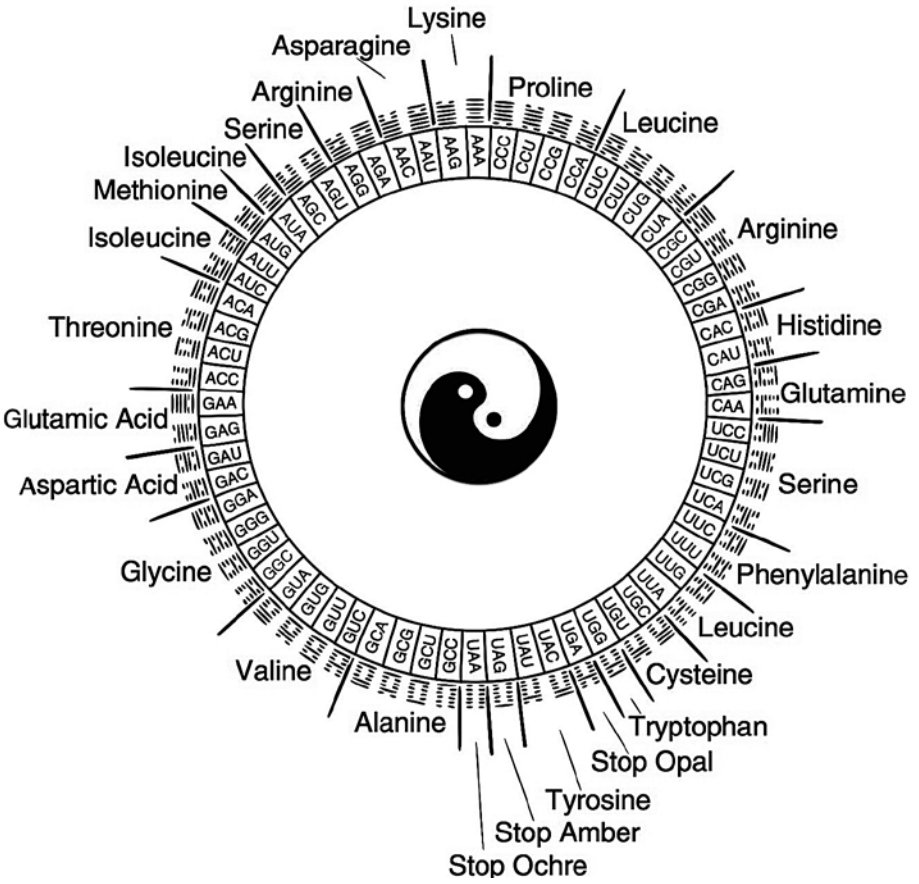


Figure 11.11: The 64 Hexagrams and the 64 Codons of the DNA

The DNA strands studied in modern biological sciences would be a part of a human's essence according to ancient Daoist medical sciences, meaning that the passing of time, which is a form of energy, is rooted in our DNA strands. It is particularly pertinent to see that the DNA strands spiral around each other much like the spiritual energy that rises through the meridian system when certain levels have been achieved through study of internal arts such as Nei Dan. This spiral lights up as it forms a kind of transmitter for the energy passing through it. At later stages the whole body can be seen to glow with a white light, and it is my belief that the individual strands of the body's DNA are then replicating this process and transmitting a particular form of spiritual energy which can only be developed at extremely high levels of spiritual awakening. This may be the root mechanism behind such

phenomena as the well-documented 'rainbow body' of Tibet or 'diamond body' of Daoism, discussed in Chapter 9.

Through these teachings from the *Yi Jing*, which connect the energy of time with consciousness and physicality, we gain insight into how the *Yi Jing* may be used medically. If we are able to change the way that a point in time is unfolding, then we are able to adjust the energetic flow of that particular moment, which will have a direct effect upon both our mind and our physical body. By changing the nature of our Ming, we may change the nature of our own being.

THE COSMOS IS CONSCIOUS

A realization reached by every great spiritual tradition was that the cosmos itself was conscious; more than that, it was consciousness. This profound understanding of the nature of the Heavens was agreed upon by all of the ancient wisdom traditions without exception; the only division came with regard to how each tradition perceived this universal consciousness to exist. Although the original teachings may have pointed towards a more ethereal approach to discussing the nature of the consciousness pervading all of life, successive generations added their own personified interpretation of the teachings, and thus gods and deities were created. Now that this consciousness took on a humanistic form, it could be worshipped as something existing separate from the realm of man and so religions came into being. As each religion believed that their version of personified consciousness was the only truth, conflict abounded and division on the level of acquired mind was created.

Daoism took a different stance and simply stated that the consciousness of the cosmos could not be described, discussed or understood in any great way. It was certainly not to be personified because it was beyond the limitations of form. Later, once again, the teachings of Daoism were distorted and the religion of Daoism was created, which included a whole pantheon of gods to be worshipped by its followers. Originally, this was not the case and, rather than being a separate entity from humankind, conciousness was an integral part of it which could be accessed within each and every person on Earth, given the right training. The reason for this was the same rule that governs many areas of the Daoist tradition. Spirit or consciousness has to be rooted in energy which has to be rooted in form. If there is a single consciousness that governs the movements of the universe and everything within it, then it also has to be a part of every single form

that exists as part of that universe. This train of thought led the Daoists to the conclusion that consciousness resided within every single thing that exists between the realms of Heaven and Earth, and this consciousness is once again a small part of the greater consciousness which governs all. Like individual cells that make up a larger organism, it is the consciousness within each of us that makes up the larger spirit of existence.

The closest we can come to the frequency at which consciousness exists is the frequency of Shen. This is the most refined of the 'three treasures' of Jing, Qi and Shen that make up each and every one of us. Our Shen connects us back into the great collective consciousness if we are able to understand how to cultivate and accesses it sufficiently. It is a two-way connection to the divinity that originally gave birth to existence. This is shown in Figure 11.12.

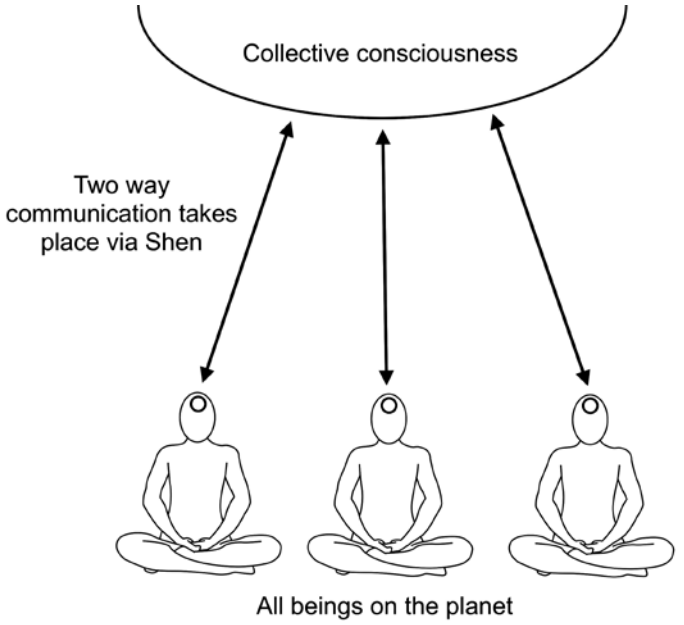


Figure 11.12: Humans' Connection to Universal Consciousness

As shown in the image, universal consciousness divides into individual parts when it becomes mankind. The collective Shen of the cosmos becomes the individual Shen of each living creature on Earth, which then generates the individual energy, or Qi, of every living creature. The spirit and energy that has divided at this stage is then rooted in the individual physical forms born from our Jing. In this way, universal consciousness roots itself in every

single individuated life form on the planet. Those who falsely identify solely with the physical realm, accessed through their own five senses, will always perceive only the individualistic manifestation of reality. Those able to go deep enough into the core of their consciousness will manage to dissolve their connection to the physical form and perceive the truth of our interconnectedness at the level of original spirit. This is the process inherent within all great spiritual traditions, even if that message has been lost along the line somewhere. Nei Dan is the Daoist method for realizing this truth, and the *Yi Jing* is a tool to help cultivate the mind towards this same place.

This is an important concept to come to terms with in order to understand the thought processes behind the development and usage of the *Yi Jing*. It is because of this connection with the consciousness of the universe that we are able to make the *Yi Jing* work with regard to its applications in divination, astronomy, medicine and so on. The Daoists believed that the path of our Ming was simply a manifestation of the movements and eddies of this divine consciousness. The consciousness of the universe is simply experiencing itself through the medium of our physical forms. In this way it has a direct influence on every aspect of our existence. This influence can be read and understood if we are able to read the signs of it taking place around us. These signs are the way in which the universe communicates with us. We can see a long fascination with the study of the signs of communication given to us by the universe when we look at the roles of wise men and women in ancient cultures. As far back as history is recorded, each tribe had a person or persons who took the role of communicating the signs that the universe was giving to the rest of the tribe. These mystics would look for omens and signals showing when the most auspicious time was to hunt or marry. Through observations of the weather, patterns in the sky, the appearance of rare animals and a multitude of other methods, the language of universal consciousness was explored and interpreted. It became clear through this process that there was no such thing as a random event and that each and every thing that took place within the universe was part of a grand scheme, a pattern that unfolded beyond the lifespan of any one individual. This lack of random events takes away the existence of coincidence, chance meetings, luck and any other concept that serves to deny the existence of a universal consciousness. For the most part, every culture has held this view and it is actually something of a modern phenomenon to deny the meaning behind events that occur in our life. If there is no random chance, then there is only an event that

stimulates the generation of another event and so on. Cause and effect causes the rolling by of the passageway of Ming and the passing of time as studied within *Yi Jing* theory.

Divination took this understanding and turned it into something that could be used. Early methods within ancient China involved heating up bones until they cracked; the concept was that if nothing was random, then the cracks formed in the flames were not random either. The very chaotic nature of the splits formed in those bones had to adhere to a pattern because they were, once again, only a manifestation of the grand scheme of universal consciousness. Various other methods were formulated and practised based upon the same mindset, until the lines of the *Yi Jing* were created and the Gua were systemized. By doing this, the wise men of ancient China had managed to take away one of the greatest weaknesses in their previous divination methods: the subjectivity of interpretation. Although the cracks on the bones may have held a pattern, the information contained within this pattern still needed reading and that meant a great deal of subjectivity became involved. By formulating the Gua and creating a method to generate them, a mathematical way of showing the language of universal consciousness was born. Now the universe has a codified manner in which to communicate with the realm of man. Fu Xi created a symbolic way for man to listen to the universes messages; King Wen and his son expanded upon this with a written commentary on these messages. In order for us to understand exactly what information the cosmos is trying to share with us through the symbols of the Gua, we must first develop an understanding of the nature of the Gua themselves.

THE BA GUA

The eight key three-lined trigrams each represent the nature of a movement of Qi within both the microcosm of the body and the macrocosm of the environment. This energy manifests a different result within the energetic realm, which then has a direct effect upon the physical realm. Understanding the three-lined trigrams is important when trying to understand the results drawn from the *Yi Jing* because any of our results must be formed from two or more of the energies discussed below. Figure 11.13 shows the trigram Qian, which is also known as Heaven.



Figure 11.13: The Qian (乾) Gua

The Qian Gua is likened to the power of Heaven due to its powerful upward-moving energy. The pure Yang nature of this symbol, represented by the three strong Yang lines, causes Qi to rise straight up into the sky towards Heaven. Within the body it is a generative force which causes growth and uplift of internal energy towards the head. Within the environment it serves as the pure Yang aspect of all energy within the cosmos. Philosophically, it manifests as the creative peak of any event. It is the constructive and the positive, the strong and the generative.

Key philosophical descriptive words for Qian include: Heaven, Strong, Powerful, Standing Fast, Creativity, Congenital and the Divine.

Figure 11.14 shows the trigram Dui, which is also known as Lake.



Figure 11.14: The Dui (兌) Gua

The trigram of Dui is a soft-moving energy that permeates through the body, moving subtly yet with an underlying strength. This is shown by the two strong Yang lines at its core topped by a single broken Yin line. Although it appears as Yin on the surface and moves gently through us, it is still a Yang energy in nature, meaning that it is not without a certain amount of force. Philosophically, it is often known as the joyous Gua, representing the natural unfolding of events in line with the will of Dao. It is this union with the underlying forces of the cosmos that gives Dui its inner strength.

Key philosophical descriptive words for Dui include: Lake, Joy, Storage, Disintegrating and Dispersal.

Figure 11.15 shows the trigram Li, which is also known as Fire.



Figure 11.15: The Li (離) Gua

The trigram of Li is a powerful Yang energy which expands outwards from the centre of the body. It is represented by two Yang lines dividing to leave a broken Yin line at its centre. This represents the expansion of Qi taking place, which in turn relies upon there being a point of stillness from which this expansion can take place. Within the body it is a warming movement of Qi closely linked to the energy of the Heart. Philosophically, it is the symbol for realization, the divine understanding that comes from connecting to the still core of an energetic event.

Key philosophical descriptive words for Li include: Fire, Illumination, Realization, Spiritual and Emotional.

Figure 11.16 shows the trigram Zhen, which is also known as Thunder.



Figure 11.16: The Zhen (震) Gua

The Zhen Gua is the trigram of sudden beginnings. It is the symbol for the original spark that gives birth to something new. It is this spark that forms the catalyst for anything that takes place both within the macrocosm of the wider universe and within the microcosm of our own mind and body. It is a sudden energy which bursts inside of us, causing Qi to move quickly throughout the rest of the meridian system. Philosophically, Zhen is the initiator of change and the beginning of new processes.

Key philosophical descriptive words for Zhen include: Thunder, Arousal, Transformation, Beginnings and Development.

Figure 11.17 shows the trigram Xun, which is also known as Wind.



Figure 11.17: The Xun (巽) Gua

The Xun Gua shows the energy usually referred to as Wind. It is a spiralling energy which moves through the joints of the body, carrying energetic information as it goes. There is no part of the body that this energy does not reach, meaning that it can cause great harm or do great good depending upon how we relate to this energy. For this reason it is often known as the penetrative Gua: that which reaches into everything and everywhere. Philosophically, it represents the moving information of the energy of Heaven acting upon an event. Xun is the messenger of Dao and that which unites the inner and outer worlds.

The key philosophical descriptive words for Xun include: Wind, Penetration, Movement, Adaptation and Malleable.

Figure 11.18 shows the trigram Kan, which is also known as Water.



Figure 11.18: The Kan (坎) Gua

The Kan Gua is often known as the Gua of danger. It represents the risky nature of an event taking place at this current moment. It has the potential to change into that which has a positive outcome or a negative outcome depending upon our actions at this present time. It is symbolized by a single Yang line of movement between two still Yin lines. This shows the disturbance being caused in the present moment. Although the past and

the future may hold stillness and peace, right now we are experiencing turmoil and change. This Gua shows the movement of energy around the body in a cyclical fashion. It is closely linked to the Qi of the Kidneys which govern the unfolding of our life-force as well as dictating how well we will fare as we move through life. It is the unpredictable manifestation of an event unfolding that must be paid attention to in order to prevent potential disaster.

Key philosophical descriptive words for Kan include: Water, Danger, Risk, Fear and the Reservoir.

Figure 11.19 shows the trigram Gen, which is also known as Mountain.



Figure 11.19: The Gen (艮) Gua

The Gen Gua is the Mountain trigram. It is the abrupt end of the unfolding of an event. It is the culmination of a process taking place. Philosophically, it can also represent the ability to stand fast against pressure without bending. It is the potential for resilience within an event and the person experiencing the event taking place. Within the body it feels like a slowing or stopping of a movement of energy. This can take place in starts and stops, which feels as if your Qi is 'stuttering' as it moves. It also tends to move downwards within the body towards the ground.

Key philosophical descriptive words for Gen include: Mountain, Stillness, Core Strength, Ending, Conclusion and Stopping.

Figure 11.20 shows the trigram Kun, which is also known as Earth.



Figure 11.20: The Kun (坤) Gua

Kun is the Gua of Earth. It is ultimate Yin and as such represents complete stillness. It is the receptive energy of an event which simply allows what will happen to happen. It is trusting and open to the effects of other energies around it at that particular time, yet it is not weak. It draws its strength from its ability to react subtly to the events around it. In its stillness lies its profound ability to yield to anything taking place at that moment. Within the body this energy strongly wishes to connect with the Earth. It is the most powerful downward-pulling internal energy that there is, which, once connected with the force of the planet, leads to deep stillness within the centre of the mind.

Key philosophical descriptive words for Kun include: Earth, Receiving, Feminine, Special, Sacred, Ancient, Yielding and Encompassing.

THE ENERGIES OF EXISTENCE

It is the collective relationships between these eight key energies that give birth to everything within the cosmos. Microcosmically, we also have these eight movements of information within our own bodies, which in turn give birth to all of the various processes that unfold within us. These processes, both within us and in the outer world, are the result of the points at which two of these energies come together. As they relate to each other, they produce the potential for change and evolution, which is the constant rule of existence. The 64 hexagrams symbolize the coming together of these eight energies in every possible combination. The insights into each hexagram left in the form of various sages' commentaries are discussions of the nature of change created by the eight energies relating to each other. This theory can be seen within alchemical theory in many places. A clear example is the coming together of Kan and Li to produce a point of change between the two, which allows us to enter into the acquired mind and bring about change.

It is quite difficult for us to connect fully with the movement of these eight energies within our surrounding environment in order to gain a tangible experience of the nature of change. Luckily, however, we are more capable of connecting with the same process taking place within our own energy systems. That which happens inside of us directly reflects that which takes place outside of us. This was why inner searching through practices such as Nei Dan was a prerequisite for any Daoist who wanted to understand the laws of the cosmos. In order to understand the nature of Dao, we must first understand it within one of its manifestations – us. It is for this reason

that I strongly connect the *Yi Jing* with Nei Dan. I do not believe a person can really understand or utilize the *Yi Jing* without first practising Nei Dan.

The relationship of the eight key Gua to each other while learning this process is represented by two different circular arrangements shown in Figure 11.21.

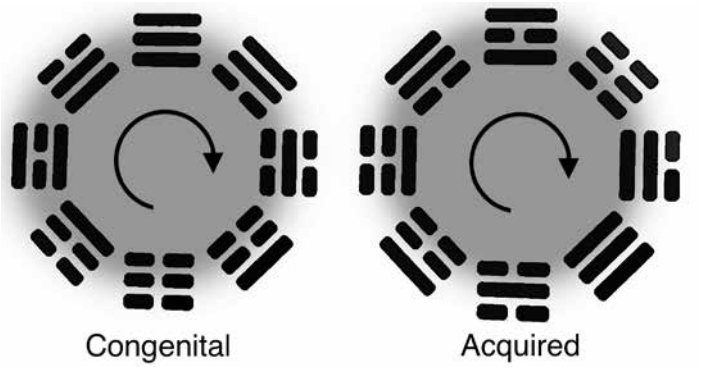


Figure 11.21: The Two Circular Arrangements

The first arrangement is the congenital arrangement of the eight Gua. This arrangement is also commonly known as the pre-Heaven or pre-birth arrangement. This shows the key manner in which the eight key energies relate to each other in the wider environment. Heaven and Earth are situated as the two great poles of Yang and Yin at the top and bottom of the arrangement. This shows the processes of existence taking place in the space between Heaven and Earth. This arrangement basically shows the macrocosmic process of change taking place as the eight energies move outside of us in the wider cosmos. In this arrangement each trigram is placed with its opposite on the other side of the circle. This is to show the importance of Yin and Yang polar opposites in the creation of the wider cosmos.

The second arrangement is the acquired arrangement of the eight Gua. It is also known as the post-Heaven or post-birth arrangement. Fire is now at the top of the circular arrangement and Water is on the bottom. These represent the acquired states of the human mind once mundane thoughts and acquired beliefs have entered into an otherwise enlightened mind. The divine connection to true consciousness that we were born with has now been disturbed by the formation of our acquired mind, which we falsely identify with. All of the eight movements of energy take place between these two poles, meaning that the arrangement here shows the movement

of energy taking place within the microcosms of the human energy body and mind. Now the energies of the trigrams are placed in such an order that they flow into one another. The polar opposite forces of Yin and Yang seen in the previous arrangement are now gone; instead, this arrangement focuses on how each trigram flows into the next, governing the development of the human mind and energy system.

These two different arrangements of the Gua show the process of understanding what a person will go through during their learning of and mastery of the *Yi Jing*. In the early stages the acquired arrangement will be most pertinent. The results gleaned from the divination process will manifest from relationships of the Gua according to this circular arrangement. Fire and Water will be the key symbols forming the two poles. As you progress and develop a stronger connection to the process inherent within *Yi Jing* usage, you will begin to move into connecting with the congenital arrangement, and thus the two poles of Heaven and Earth will be the dictatorial powers that govern your results. This will manifest as different types of readings which, at first, give you insight into your own nature seen as separate from the wider cosmos. As you progress, you will begin to gain deeper insights whereby you are an integral part of the universe and all that takes place within it. This process only begins to take place once this realization is experientially understood in the very core of your being. It is one of the great strengths of the *Yi Jing* that it enables you to understand this truth.

THE PASSING OF TIME

It is important to understand that time is not seen in the same manner in *Yi Jing* philosophy as in contemporary society. Most people would see the present moment as sitting at the forefront of a series of previously occurring moments which stretch out behind us into the past. Ahead of us is nothing as the future has yet to take place. This is not how the *Yi Jing* discusses the nature of time and the events that take place within this time. Instead, time is perceived as nothing more than the present moment, which is the manifestation of the previous present moments. The future is yet to manifest but it already exists. In a similar manner of thinking to cutting-edge quantum theory, Daoism takes the stance that the past, the present and the future all exist right now at the present moment at the same time. Time is a cyclical entity which we experience subjectively through the filter of our own mind, yet this is not its true nature. It really is nothing more

than an experience we are being tricked into by our acquired consciousness and this is the key reason we are able to use the *Yi Jing*'s guidance to help direct us through the events that we are subjectively experiencing. Instead of focusing on concepts of past, present and future, it is perhaps more accurate to consider each event being explored through the *Yi Jing* as dependent upon something that caused it to manifest and the potential it has to manifest into other events. These manifested events are already in existence, though, which means that we can gain insight into the particular manifestation to connect with. Which potential outcome shall we shift our acquired mind towards in order to subjectively experience this particular 'future' outcome?

When reading the hexagrams, we start at the bottom and work our way up towards the top. The base of the hexagram shows that which caused the present moment we are experiencing to manifest, and the top line shows the likely manifestation we will experience due to the course we have taken. Right in the centre of the six lines is the present moment. This is the point at which we are currently experiencing an energetic shift according to our subjective mind. This point is shown in Figure 11.22.

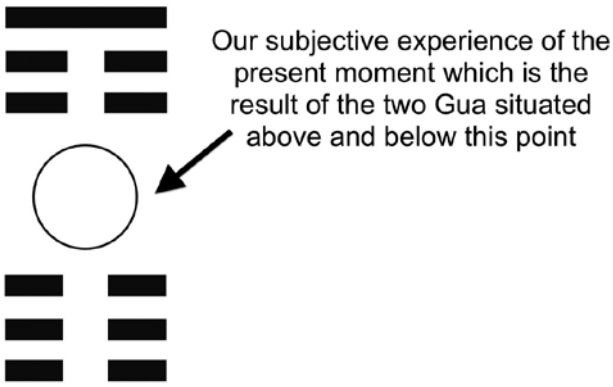


Figure 11.22: The Subjective Present Moment

This is the first way to read a hexagram. It is the method we would employ if we were exploring the nature of an event as it was unfolding for us. This concept will be explored in more detail when we begin learning how to read the information contained in the various Gua.

The second key method for reading a hexagram concerns exploration of the nature of an event rather than how it is unfolding. In this method we are trying to understand what is at the core of something and how it is

manifesting on the outside. This would be a way of understanding the root cause of an experience we are having right now. Figure 11.23 shows this way of reading a hexagram.

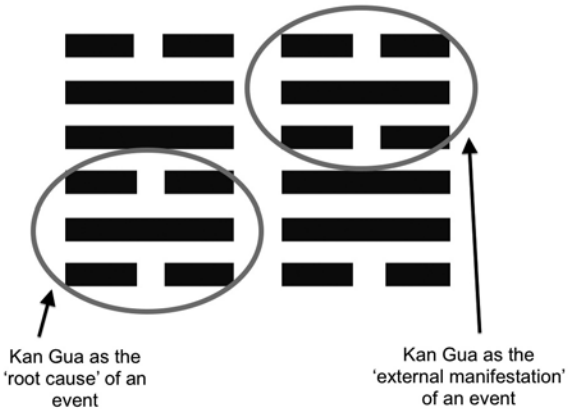


Figure 11.23: The Core and Manifestation of an Event

You can see from Figure 11.23 how we have two key energies. The first is the lower energy. This shows us the nature of the root cause of the experience or event that we are exploring. The upper Gua shows how this root cause is being manifested or how this event actually appears on the outside. The placement of the trigrams at different locations changes the nature of our reading. For example, in the diagram shown in Figure 11.23 the first hexagram shows the Kan (Water) Gua on the bottom. This indicates the potential of danger or uncertainty lying at the core of this event. The second hexagram has the same Gua (Kan/Water), except that this time it is in the upper position. This shows us that although the experience may be manifesting as something difficult, at its core this risk does not really exist. Further exploration of this concept will be undertaken when we look at how to read the hexagrams we obtain through taking a *Yi Jing* reading.

Chapter 12

DIVINATION METHOD

Using the *Yi Jing* as a form of divination enables us to directly access the information of the universe. In Chapter 11 we saw how the formation of the Gua is a direct result of the movements of Yin and Yang as they emerge from the emptiness of Wuji and then intermingle with one another. The different degrees of these 'interminglings' give us two-line symbols, followed by three-line symbols, followed by the 64 six-line hexagrams. Each of these Gua can be seen as the Qi of an unfolding moment and each of these aspects of Qi carries with it a piece of information. This is the information born from the potential of Wuji before it moves to pervade the entire realm of existence. No information is ever random; it is all part of the grand scheme of Wuji which is the conveyer of the 'mandate of Heaven', the Ming of the macrocosm. Through our divination we are tapping into this information so that we may grow to understand how the Qi of the moment we are experiencing is going to unfold.

Divination is broken down into three parts: understanding how to set up a divination space, how to take a reading and finally how to interpret the answers. Each of these three aspects of *Yi Jing* divination is discussed in this chapter. Note, though, that the explanation here is only an introductory guide to *Yi Jing* divination and as such only covers the basics of understanding the movements of the Gua. Full divination would take into account the Chinese calendar which is based upon the movements of the esoteric stems and branches as well as various more complex energetic and spiritual properties of the Gua and their movements. Newcomers to *Yi Jing* divination will find, however, that if they follow the method outlined here, they will gain access to the *Yi Jing*. Your foot will be through the door and then further study should then be applied once you become comfortable with this method.

A DIVINATION SPACE

Any divination should take place within a special space that has been set up accordingly. Different schools of *Yi Jing* divination had different ways to set up this kind of sacred space; many of these differences depended largely upon which sect of Daoism they belonged to. On the whole, religious sects of Daoism tend to have a more elaborate process for setting up the space than non-religious practitioners. This is because religious practitioners are often attempting to invoke various deities in order to benefit from their assistance during the reading, whereas non-religious Daoists tend to be focused on ensuring that the energies in the space are auspicious for taking a reading. There is no right way or wrong way to establish your divination space, but I will outline my own method here and you can then decide whether or not to follow these guidelines.

I prefer to take readings indoors. This is because I prefer to keep the energy within a set space. This prevents the accumulated energy from dispersing, which it will tend to do if outdoors. If outside doing a reading, then it would have to be on a warm day with no wind at all. I then prefer to be in thick forests as the trees naturally provide a sort of energetic mesh which holds the information field that is generated in place. When you become practised at this kind of work, you will see what I mean for yourself. You should never do a reading near a large body of water or high on a hill with strong winds; this kind of environment makes it difficult for any energy to condense at all. The space wants to be well aired, if it is indoors, and very quiet. You never want to be in a place where you are going to be disturbed. Try to find a place with as little electrical equipment around; essentially, look for a similar place to one in which you would do your sitting practice.

Within this space there should be a table for you to do your reading on. This table should be low enough that you can sit on the floor, if you are comfortable like this, and large enough that you have enough space to manipulate the yarrow stalks. Classically, the table was supposed to be square to represent the energy of Earth, but rectangular will do. On the table you should lay a red cloth because the vibrational pattern of the colour red will help energy to expand around the region of the table. On the table should be laid 50 yarrow stalks, which we will discuss later. There should also be a pen and paper for recording your results; place these to the side of the table so that they are not the focal point for your attention. Next to this paper should be a copy of the *Yi Jing* for consulting the Gua

commentaries. On one of the far corners of the table should be placed an incense holder with three incense sticks. This means that your divination table will look like the example shown in Figure 12.1.

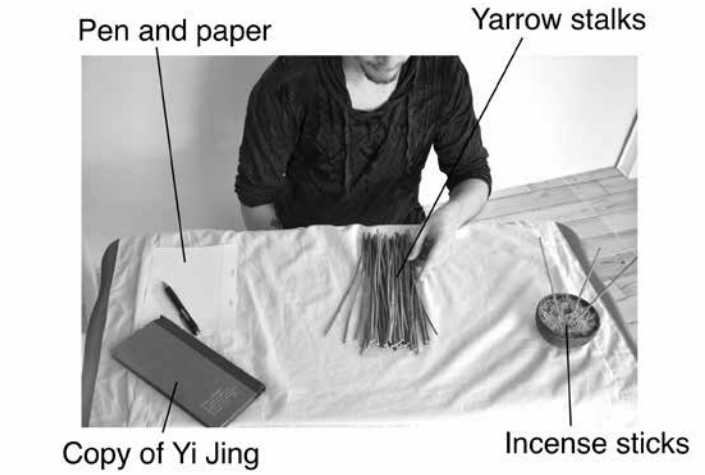


Figure 12.1: A Divination Space

The next stage in preparing your space is to cleanse the energy within the area in which you are going to be working. There are two ways to do this. The first is to light the three incense sticks and allow the smoke to move through the space. The second is to use a simple sound to cleanse the area. I have seen Daoists in temples using bells and gongs to do this, but I favour a singing bowl. You should find whatever works for you. In order to understand the reasons for this, we should look at everything within the space being a form of energy or information. This information exists, in part, as a vibration. When we make a sound, such as using the singing bowl repeatedly for a few minutes, we send out a sound vibration which moves through the area. This vibration harmonizes the movement of energy within the region that may have been chaotic prior to the sound being made. If you are ever fortunate enough to go to a temple in Asia on the day of a ceremony, you will see how they often use one clear sound, be it a large gong or a beat of the drum, to accomplish this. When the sound has faded away, the energy within the area has been harmonized and so the ceremony can begin. The importance of the incense sticks can be understood when we look at everything having a vibrational resonance, even numbers and patterns. The smoke from the incense spirals around within the space, causing the energy around the divination area to do the

same. The number three is said to carry the resonance of Yang, Heaven, and so this also has a positively energizing effect upon the space. The burning of incense in this way also helps to clear away any stagnation of energy, which is seen as negative to the divination taking place. We wish all of the energy to move freely around us so that information of the *Yi Jing* reading can come through unimpeded.

Once the space has been cleared, we need to clean all the implements being used in the reading because any object can pick up energetic stagnation, including yourself. We do this by running every item through the smoke of the incense. In this way we 'bathe' our implements prior to their use. This should include the pen and paper, the copy of the *Yi Jing* and all 50 yarrow stalks. Note that the yarrow stalks can be done in one go; there is no need to do each stick individually as that would take a long time. After this has been done, you should rub your hands together in the smoke as well.

Now, from here there are various ways to unite yourself with the space. Many of these are ceremonial. Ceremonies work like anything else. Each ceremony carries a vibrational pattern which is developed over repeated use down through the generations. Newly created ceremonies will never have the power of an ancient one. In our case, though, we do not need a ceremony because we have Nei Dan instead. Since this book has been looking at alchemical meditation, you may as well use this as your way of engaging with your divination space. Sit down and practise Nei Dan, whatever stage you are at, for 20–30 minutes prior to doing your reading. Beginners will find that by harmonizing their breath and taking themselves as close as possible to stillness they will begin to connect with the practice they are about to engage in. Experienced practitioners will find that entering Wuji will fully absorb their consciousness into the divination space. This will harmonize the energy of their mind with the practice they are about to undertake. I strongly believe that trying to carry out a reading with the *Yi Jing* without prior sitting practice will greatly weaken the results. Wuji is the potential for everything; it is the space within which the energy of the universe is born. If you can take your internal environment to this state, then the information will flow around and into you to a far higher degree. In this way the information of the Gua will surround you, waiting for the reading to take place. This is shown in Figure 12.2.



When entering Wuji, the surrounding information of the Gua is ordered. Harmony is established through the alignment of Yin and Yang's sequential growth and decline. This will align the energy perfectly for taking a reading from the *Yi Jing*.

When not in Wuji, the natural state of the surrounding Qi is slightly scattered and chaotic as a result of the actions of the acquired mind. Though a reading can still be taken, it will not be as accurate.

Figure 12.2: The Potential of Wuji

Taking a *Yi Jing* reading is not a religious practice in itself, but it is a sacred practice. In order to connect yourself with the essence of any scared act, you should strive to still the acquired mind so that true consciousness can become involved.

TAKING A READING

As stated in Chapter 11, the use of yarrow stalks is required for adequately using the *Yi Jing*. If you are already familiar with the *Yi Jing* but use either the two- or three-coin methods, I would advise learning to use the stalks instead. The coins do not take into the account the different likelihood of some Gua compared with others which is what makes them give slightly inaccurate readings. The energetic properties of yarrow connect them to the spirit realm which is why yarrow should be used over any other material. The retreat I currently run in Sweden each year is a perfect place for yarrow stalk gathering and the training hall often has bundles of stalks hung up to dry by the *Yi Jing* students.

The first step in taking a reading is forming a question. Different teachers have their own guidelines on how to do this. These are the guidelines I tend to give:

- The first type of question you can ask is the current state of something, an event or a person. The second type of question you can ask is about how something will progress over time.

- Do not ask yes or no questions. The *Yi Jing* gives complex information and rarely a definitive yes or no.
- Make sure the questions are based in something which would be likely to receive answers from the space of Wuji. For example, questions on what clothes to buy or whether you will win the lottery rarely yield useful answers. Try to ask from the correct part of your being, not the shallowness of the acquired mind.
- Some teachers say to not ask question about other people, but I disagree. It is fine to ask about a person in your life, but questions on complete strangers should be avoided. Be aware, though, that you will usually be given an answer on the other person with regard to how their Ming and your Ming interact with each other. This means that really only people close to you should be included in questions.

Questions About the Current State of Something

These questions may relate to something such as the state of your health, the state of your relationship to somebody, your role within an organization or countless other things. The options are endless. An example for me might be: 'What is the state of my role as the head of an internal arts organization? Am I fulfilling the role to the best of my ability?'

Two-sectioned questions such as this are good: the more detailed the question, the more detailed the answer given by the *Yi Jing*. The answer you will be given to a question such as this will be in two parts: the first part will concern the answer to this question and the second part will show options of how to improve this situation. I last taught the *Yi Jing* to a group of people in the UK about a year ago and many of the students asked about the state of their health or the appropriateness of their occupation. Many of the students were completely new to the use of the *Yi Jing* and were surprised by the depth and accuracy of the results.

Questions About the Progression of Something

These questions will be looking at something within the current moment and how this something will change with time. These might be questions about how your health will develop in the future, how your personal relationship is going to change or how your role within an organization

is going to evolve. Again, there is no real limit to the questions that can be asked. An example for me might be: 'How is my role as the head of an internal arts organization going to change in the future? What is the best way for me to take the school in the right direction?'

The answer given to these kinds of questions will show first how the past has led you to your current situation and then how it is going to change. It will also show you various potential ways in which the Ming of the situation you are enquiring about could flow.

Asking the Question

After preparing the space and completing your sitting practice, you should ask your question. The exact method of doing this varies from person to person; some like to say their question out loud, some like to say it quietly within their head, and I have even met one practitioner who liked to write it on paper and then burn it in a pot on the divination table. Whichever method works for you is fine. The only real key is that you have brought your mind to as still a point as you can and then your question is brought into your head. Focus on this question and nothing else for a few minutes before beginning the reading. Any thought you have generates an energetic reaction. This reaction then moves out through the various layers of your energetic matrix until it permeates through the auric field. It is this movement of information out from the mind into the external environment that establishes a connection between yourself and the divination space you have created. Now for the fun part: the use of the yarrow stalks!

USING THE YARROW STALKS

When students are first shown how to use the yarrow stalks, they are surprised by how complex it can be. There is usually a lot of dropping of the sticks in the beginning and the hands may have to become a little more dexterous in order to manipulate the sticks properly. Fifty yarrow stalks need to be moved between your fingers and then placed on the table in a certain way in order to ascertain the various static and moving lines of the hexagrams that will form the basis for your reading. Note that if you do drop the sticks, you will have to repeat the entire process, including the sitting practice prior to taking the reading. This is because the act of dropping the sticks disrupts the Qi within the area and this must then be re-harmonized. For this reason you should spend some time in the beginning isolating the

use of the yarrow stalks and learning how to handle them efficiently prior to taking a full reading. The yarrow stalks are used in the following way.

Take the bundle of 50 yarrow stalks and remove one stalk from the bunch. Lay it in front of you on the table sideways as shown in Figure 12.3. This stick represents the state of Wuji as it manifests through into the realm of existence.

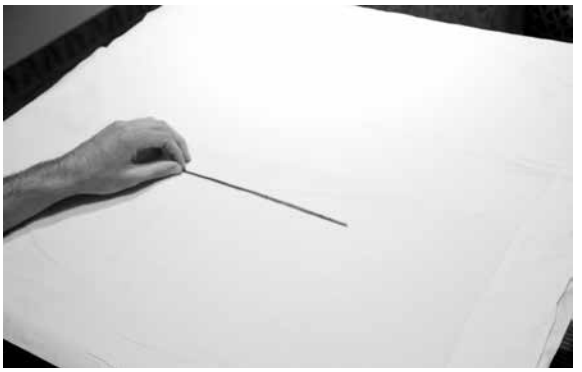


Figure 12.3: The Wuji Yarrow Stalk

Every number has an energetic resonance, just like everything else, and so in this case the number one represents union. One is the number of completion and reconnecting of the various acquired substances in order to establish union with the origin. This origin is the source of Wuji from which Yin and Yang were originally born.

This should leave you with 49 yarrow stalks which you place into your left hand as shown in Figure 12.4.

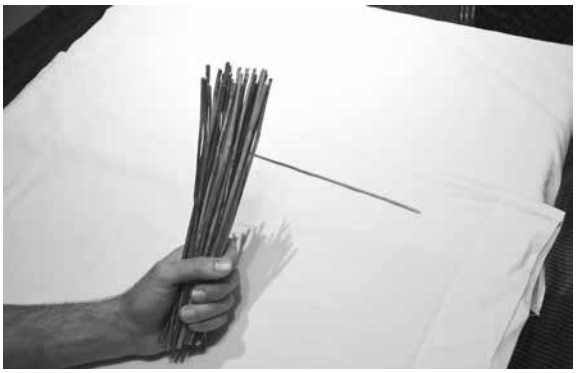


Figure 12.4: Holding the 49 Yarrow Stalks of Divination

Now divide this bundle into two parts by splitting the bundle with your right hand. This should be done without too much thought because this 'random' dividing of the stalks is where the information of Wuji comes through. This is because nothing is random; there are just patterns which are often difficult for us to perceive. Place the pile from the right hand on to the table to the right of the 'Wuji stalk' as shown in Figure 12.5.

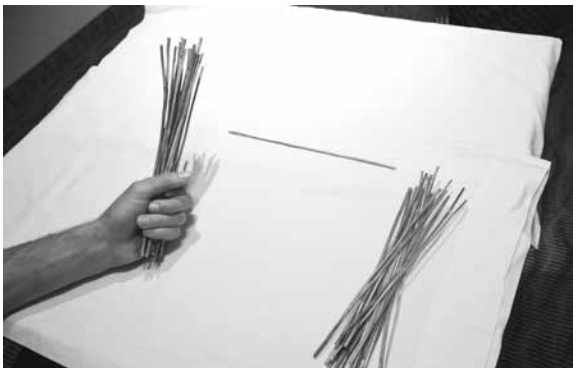


Figure 12.5: Dividing the Yarrow Stalks

This should leave one of the two divided bundles of stalks in your left hand and the other half on the table. First, take one yarrow stalk from the bundle on the table and place it between the knuckles of your ring and little fingers. This is shown in Figure 12.6.

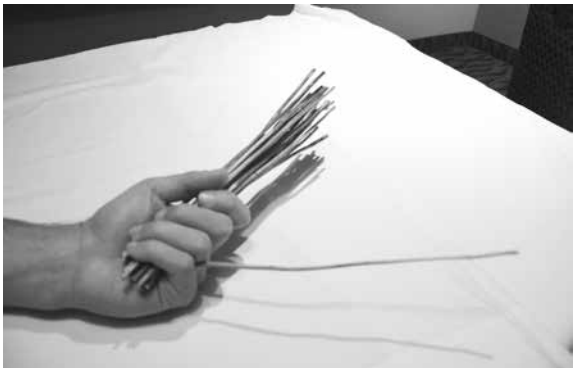


Figure 12.6: Holding the Bundle with the Extra Stalk

Now begin to count out bundles of four stalks at a time from the bundle in your left hand. The number four represents the death of something, the decline of the unrequired information from the divination. Place these four-

stalk bundles on to the table in their own pile. Continue to do this until you have four or fewer stalks remaining in your left hand. When you have done this, take the remaining stalks and place them between the knuckles of your middle and ring finger. Now pick up the original stack which you placed to the right of the Wuji stick and place it into the left hand; this should leave you holding the stalks as shown in Figure 12.7. This is where it gets a little fiddly, so try not to drop the stalks.

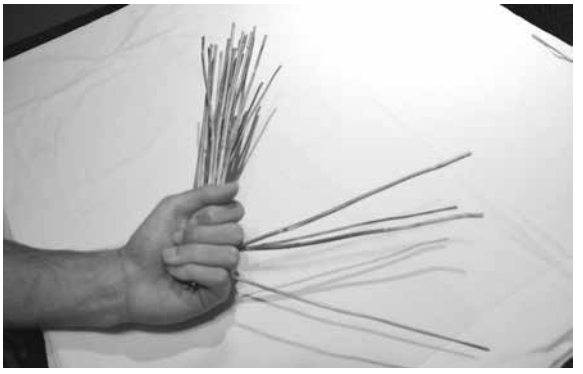


Figure 12.7: Holding the Stalks

Now repeat the process of drawing out four stalks at a time and placing them in the discarded stalk pile until you have four or fewer left in this bundle. If you have managed to do this correctly, you should be left with either a total of five or nine stalks in your left hand. This will be a combination of the bundle you just drew from as well as the remaining stalks held between your knuckles. Figure 12.8 shows an example of this whereby the practitioner has been left with five stalks.

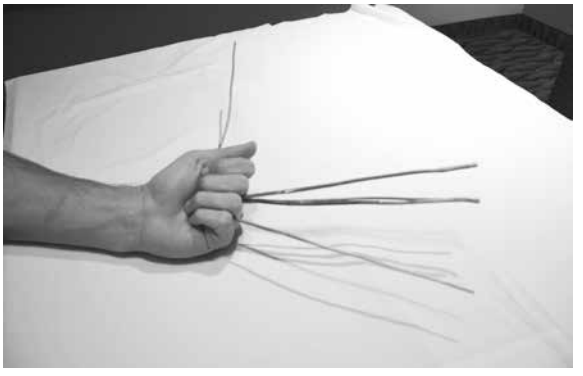


Figure 12.8: Five or Nine Stalks as a Result

Five actually represents a result of Yang, whereas nine represents a result of Yin, but we will get to that soon. Now take this small bundle and place them across the 'Wuji stalk' as shown in Figure 12.9.

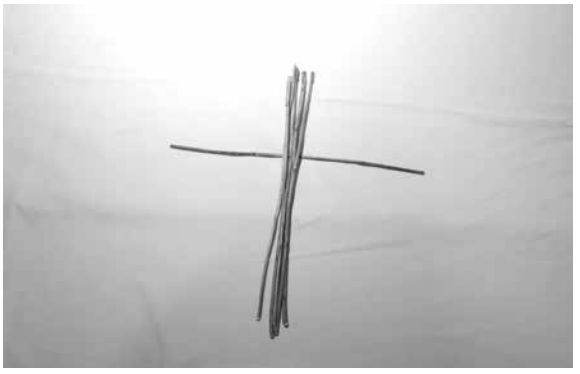


Figure 12.9: Laying the Results Across the Wuji Stalk

Next, leaving these stalks where they are, pick up the two bundles once more and repeat the process. Divide the bundle of stalks randomly, placing one of the stalks from the pile on the table between the knuckles of your ring and little finger. Then draw out four at a time from the first half. Place these between the knuckles of the middle and ring finger when there are four or fewer and then do the same with the other half of the bundle. This should leave you with a combined result of four or eight instead of five or nine. Figure 12.10 shows a practitioner who has a result of four yarrow stalks from this stage in the divination.

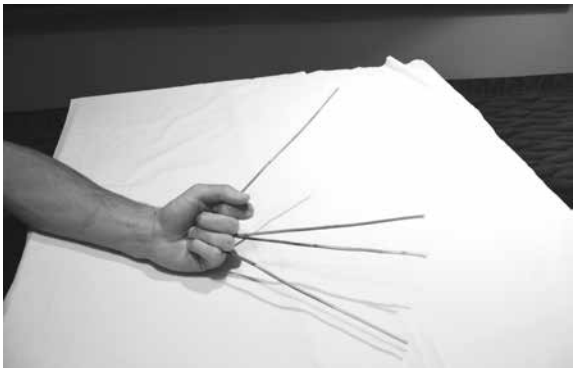


Figure 12.10: The Second Stage of the Reading

In this case, four is Yang, whereas eight is Yin. You should carry this process out once more, which will give you another result of either four or eight. This should then leave you with three piles of yarrow stalks across the 'Wuji stalk' as shown in Figure 12.11. This is the end of the search for the first line of your hexagram.

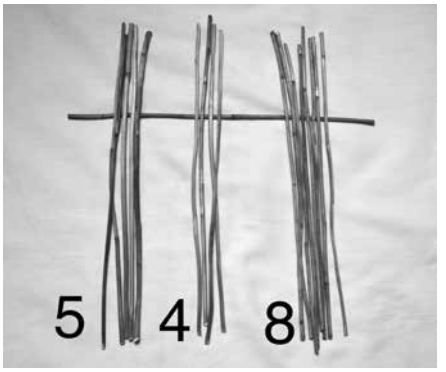


Figure 12.11: The First Line of the Hexagram

To make totally clear what the results should be at this stage, you will have three piles of stalks across the 'Wuji stalk'. The first pile will have either five or nine stalks, the second pile either four or eight stalks and the third pile either four or eight stalks.

Understanding the Results of the First Line

The process you have just gone through will give the first of six lines that you need to ascertain. This will be the bottom line of the hexagram as they are both read and constructed from the base to the top. In order to find our results, we will look at the combinations of Yin and Yang that make up the line. This will then either gives us a 'true Yin line', a 'true Yang line', a 'changing Yin line' or a 'changing Yang line'. True Yin and Yang lines represent a stable aspect of the hexagram, whereas a changing line represents the potential for evolution of the situation. To find out which line we have just found, we need to change the numbers of our drawn piles into either two, which represents Yin, or three, which represents Yang. We do this by following the simple equation:

- Five is Yang and equals a three
- Nine is Yin and equals a two
- Four is Yang and equals a three
- Eight is Yin and equals a two

This conversion of the piles into either two or three will then give you one of the following results:

- Two + two + two = six
- Two + two + three = seven
- Two + three + three = eight
- Three + three + three = nine

The exact order of the 'twos' and 'threes' within each sum does not matter. It is essentially the final number of either six, seven, eight or nine that is important. If you are left with any sum total other than six, seven, eight or nine, then something has gone wrong. You should go back through the process above and figure out where your error was.

The numbers mean the following:

- Six is a changing Yin line
- Seven is a true Yang line
- Eight is a true Yin line
- Nine is a changing Yang line

In order to understand why the changing lines and solid lines are as they are, we need to understand that for Yin or Yang to be stable each needs to be supported by its opposite and complementary pole. The changing lines are those lines made up of either pure Yin or pure Yang. This shows that the energy has reached its peak and thus is ready to transform. Yin and Yang are two poles in constant motion and so it is as natural for a line to remain the same as it is to change. It just depends upon what stage in the cycle of transformation the particular moment is within. This is summarized in Figure 12.12.

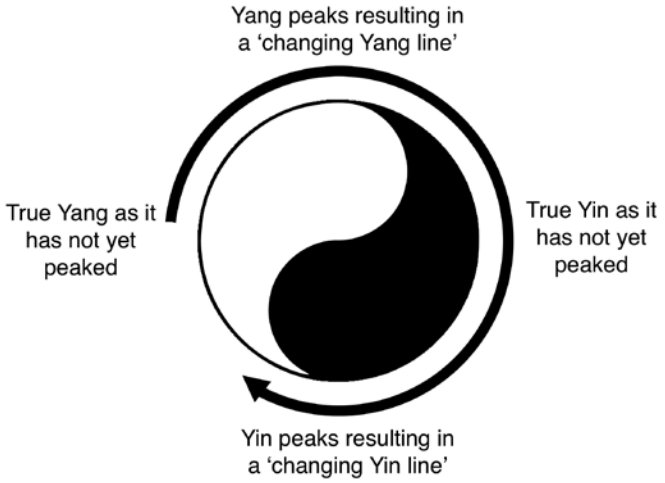


Figure 12.12: The Cycle of Yin and Yang

From the above chart we can see that there is never really any stasis of Yin or Yang; they are always cycling and changing into one another. True Yin and true Yang are known as stable lines but really they are just lines that are not yet at the right time to change. Their stability is only perceived by us to be that way because of the illusion of the present moment.

Once we have ascertained which line we are looking for, we draw one of the four symbols shown in Figure 12.13 on our piece of paper.



Figure 12.13: The Four Lines of Divination

This is the bottom line of the first hexagram that we are searching for. In order to locate the next line of the hexagram, we now pick up the entire collection of yarrow stalks, with the exception of the 'Wuji stalk' which remains in this role for the entire divination process. Now go through the entire process described above five more times. This will then give you the next five lines of the hexagram for a total of five 'true' or 'changing' lines.

By now you will most likely have realized that finding the first hexagram is quite a long and involved process. It should take you around 15 to 20 minutes to complete the divination process. Remember that if you drop any of the stalks, then you must start afresh, which is why it is wise to get used to manipulating the stalks before you attempt your first divination.

When you have finished, you should end up with a drawing of a hexagram such as the one shown in Figure 12.14. This symbol is made up of 'true' and 'changing' lines.

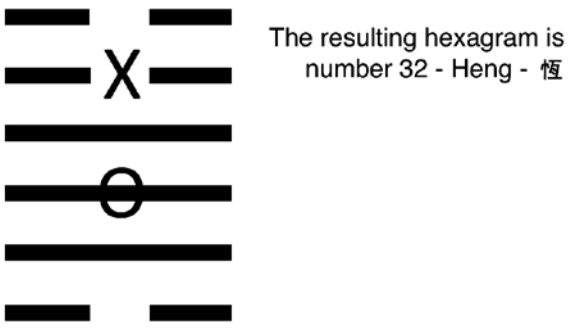


Figure 12.14: A Resultant Hexagram

The example shown in Figure 12.14 is the 32nd hexagram which is known as Heng (恆); in English it means 'to persist' or 'to last for a long time'. It is formed from two trigrams, Xun or 'Wind' for the lower trigram and Zhen or 'Thunder' for the upper trigram. It is considered that an auspicious relationship exists between the two trigrams when they are placed together into the symbol of Heng. The third line (read from the bottom up) is a changing Yang line, whereas the fifth line is a changing Yin line. This shows that although Heng may discuss the current moment, there is the potential for change to take place. In order to understand the nature of this change, we then look at the changing lines and switch them around. In this way, Yin becomes Yang and Yang becomes Yin. We switch the changing Yin lines for true Yang and the changing Yang lines for true Yin. It sounds complicated, but once you have done it a few times, you will see that it is actually quite simple. Figure 12.15 shows the process of the change of the hexagrams in our example.

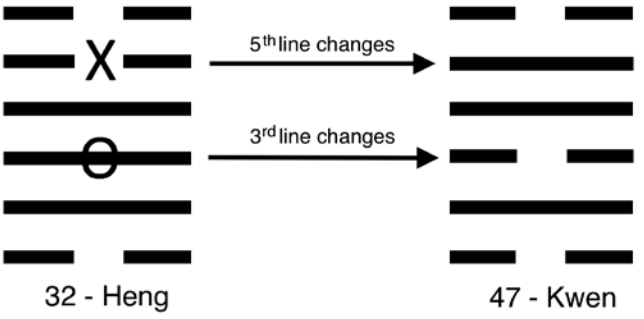


Figure 12.15: The Change of the Hexagram

In the example shown in Figure 12.15, hexagram number 32 is Heng (恆). It evolves via the changing lines into hexagram number 47, which is Kun (困). Kun is made up of the trigram Kan or 'Water' on the bottom and Dui or 'Lake' on the top. This is a less favourable combination of trigrams which shows the potential for upcoming difficulties. The translation of the word Kun into English can mean to be 'exhausted'.

By going through this process, we now have all of the information we require to understand the nature of the current state of events as well as the nature of the change that is coming up and also the resultant outcome of this change. There is now also one more key symbol that we can look at. This symbol is the 'hidden hexagram'. The hidden hexagram shows us the potential for hidden energetics at play behind the scenes of the current moment. We always seek the 'hidden hexagram' from within the first hexagram that we generated from our divination, rather than the second hexagram which came about as a result of any changing lines. The hidden hexagram is formed in two parts: the lower trigram is taken from the second, third and fourth lines of the original hexagram, and the top trigram is formed from the third, fourth and fifth lines of the original hexagram. This is shown in Figure 12.16 in the case of our example.

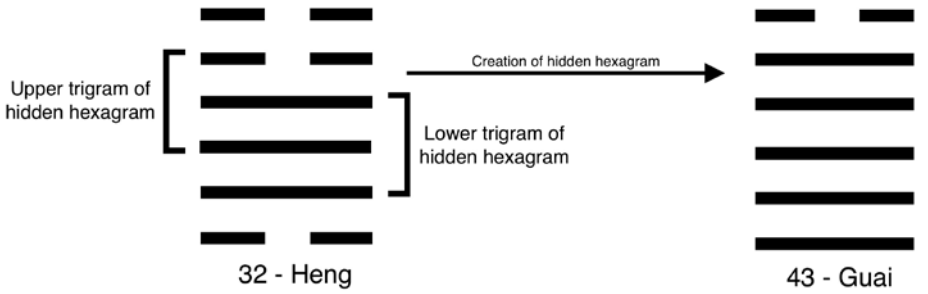


Figure 12.16: The Hidden Hexagram

In this case the 43rd hexagram of Guai (夬) has been generated. This is the hidden symbol which may give us extra insight into the background information that is causing the current state of things. In the case of Guai, the lower trigram is that of Kun or 'Earth', whereas the upper trigram is that of Dui or 'Lake'. This is a combination of symbols which shows the requirement for movement or change. The translation of Guai means 'to be decisive'.

The importance of the hidden hexagram is stressed to different degrees by each practitioner of the *Yi Jing*. It is up to you whether you seek the hidden hexagram or not in your readings. I personally like to look at it because I believe the more information on your situation the better.

If you are new to using the *Yi Jing*, then congratulations! You may be a little confused by now, but you have successfully gathered all of the information you require to begin looking into your answers. You should record all of the above data on your sheet of paper. This information will include the original hexagram, the changing lines (if any) and the resultant hexagram (if any of the lines changed). You may or may not also have the hidden hexagram if you have decided to include the information from this symbol in your reading.

Included at the back of all copies of the *Yi Jing* will be a handy table for helping you to locate the correct hexagram by number. Figure 12.17 is a copy of one of these charts. It is read by first locating the lower trigram, which is the symbol down the left-hand column, and then locating the upper trigram by looking at the symbol along the top row. Where the two meet is the number of the hexagram you are looking for.

	☰	☳	☵	☶	☷	☴	☲	☱
☰	1	34	5	26	11	9	14	43
☳	25	51	3	27	24	42	21	17
☵	6	40	29	4	7	59	64	47
☶	33	62	39	52	15	53	56	31
☷	12	16	8	23	2	20	35	45
☴	44	32	48	18	46	57	50	28
☲	13	55	63	22	36	37	30	49
☱	10	54	60	41	19	61	38	58

Figure 12.17: Hexagram Identification Table

These numbers will be the same in any copy of the *Yi Jing* you may be using to locate the written information for each symbol.

Interpreting the Answers

In order to interpret the answers to your question, you will need first to get hold of a copy of the *Yi Jing*. There are countless translations of the *Yi Jing*, each unique in its own way. The artistic nature of classical Chinese means that the author will have understood each hexagram slightly differently. These interpretations vary greatly between direct translations through to modern versions based upon the author's intuitive understanding of the symbols. There is no easy answer as to which copy of the *Yi Jing* is the best to use. You need to find one that really suits you and that you trust. Note that this does not necessarily mean finding one that always gives you positive results, though; you should be honest and find one that includes both the good and the potentially negative. In the early days of studying the *Yi Jing*, I would suggest getting hold of several different translations and then slowly you will find that you gravitate towards the one that you feel is the best for you personally.

Your answers will be read in various stages. These stages are as follows:

- First, you should read the commentary on the initial hexagram. This will include the original writings that were contained within the *Yi Jing*. This is usually a short line of around ten words as well as a brief discussion of the meaning of the two trigrams that make up the hexagram. This will give you an overview of the meaning of the current situation you are asking about.

- Next, you should read the longer commentary for this trigram if you have a copy of the *Yi Jing* that includes one. Different commentaries were written by different scholars and some translations include some or all of the available commentaries on each hexagram.

- Then look at the same two parts for the hidden hexagram if you are using it. This will be the short discussion of the symbol as well as the longer commentary if it is included in your copy of the *Yi Jing*.

- Now look for the changing lines. In the case of the example shown in Figure 12.14, it was lines three and five that were changing. This means that I should read the text next to the third and fifth changing lines. This will give me information about the process of

change that is likely to take place. Note that only the text for the lines marked as being subject to change applies to your situation.

- Now look at the resultant hexagram. Read the short original text as well as any accompanying commentary for this final hexagram in order to understand the culmination of the change process. This is your final reading when looking at the information you have taken from your *Yi Jing* divination.

AN EXAMPLE OF MY *YI JING* READING

Let us look at the example of the three hexagrams shown above to see how a question and answer may be formulated through use of *Yi Jing* divination. My questions had been:

> 'I have been teaching in the UK for several years now and wonder what I should do next in order to allow the school to progress in the best possible way. I am considering purchasing a building in England somewhere that can become a full-time base for all of my teaching. Is this the right thing for me to do?'

I then went through the process of taking a *Yi Jing* reading using the yarrow stalks as shown above. When I had finished the reading, I had generated the hexagrams from the previous example. I had drawn hexagram number 32 or 'Heng'. The changing lines were numbers three and five, meaning that Heng changed into number 47 or 'Kwen'.

Looking into the copy of the *Yi Jing* that I generally prefer to use, I ascertained the following.

The hexagram of Heng shows the symbols for Xun or 'Wind' on the bottom, with Zhen or 'Thunder' placed on the top. Xun on the base shows the penetrative forces of Heaven working its energy on an event, whereas Zhen on the top shows the emergence of something new, a bringer of change. This is a positive hexagram to generate because it shows that my current progress is going in the right direction. The commentary for the hexagram says that I should continue to endure. It also says that whenever I feel that I am straying from this path I should return to my inner self. I should concern myself only with what is necessary and correct in order to continue in the positive manner that I have done so far.

This is an interesting commentary to read because although I am happy with the positive development of my role as a teacher in the UK, I have

not been without my fair share of obstacles along the way. This hexagram shows the importance of remaining true to what I believe and pressing on without getting distracted.

Now for the changing lines which will show how things are likely to progress if I try to develop the school by purchasing a building to become the base for the school. The first changing line is the third line. I read the commentary for this line and see that the line discusses the possibility of downfall and disgrace. It also states that development should be based upon what I personally know is right rather than allowing what I perceive from others to dictate the right course of action. The second changing line is the fifth line. This line states that to continue along this line is overtly masculine; it is a decision based upon the Yang aspect of my nature which seeks to grow and conquer.

So, the changing lines are far from positive about what I am thinking of doing and there has even been a harsh judgement of my motivations behind the plans from the second changing line. This can then be used as a signpost to show an aspect of acquired self-motivation that needs to be explored through my own personal cultivation. OK, then, let's look at the resultant hexagram that came out of these changing lines. This hexagram is number 47 or 'Kwen'.

Kwen is made up of the trigram Kan or 'Water' on the bottom and Dui or 'Lake' on the top. This is a less favourable combination of trigrams which shows the potential for upcoming difficulties and also the likelihood of a negative outcome. The commentary for Kwen states that disaster will probably happen; this plan is a deviation from the higher purpose of Dao. It also states that problems may arise from the fact that my own self-belief will prevent me from dealing with the challenges that will arise after this situation has come to fruition. This suggests that if I developed a UK headquarters for the school, it would bring me many problems.

OK, so the hexagrams have been quite clear. Although I do not feel that I need it, out of interest I examine the hidden hexagram, which is number 43 or 'Guai'. This hexagram shows the hidden essence of the current situation. It shows the underlying energy that runs through my position running the school in the UK. This hexagram once again discusses the importance of resoluteness as well as the need for being able to adapt quickly to change. It discusses the importance of discarding all of the aspects of mind that may get in the way of what needs doing.

This example was a real example of a question and a reading that I took quite a few years ago now. At the time I was looking at the development

of the school which had grown faster than I had ever planned it to. I was actually feeling slightly overwhelmed at my sudden and slightly accidental role as head of a large group of internal arts practitioners and was wondering how I was going to live up to this role. The only thing I could think of was that I somehow needed a building to teach from, but then I took this reading and saw that it was probably a bad idea. Having faith in the reading, I did not purchase a building. Instead, I continued to travel, teach and train in various countries. Since this time I have seen a gradual shift in the core of the school from being in the UK to being on the continent of Europe. Although I still teach in the UK and my most experienced students are living there, the vast majority of my teaching days are spent in other places.

This is mainly how I have used the *Yi Jing*. I have consulted it as a divination tool when I have had difficult decisions to make regarding my role and the path I take through life. Although there is nothing wrong with doing so, I have never asked the *Yi Jing* any questions concerning things such as personal relationships or my own health because I feel that my role as a teacher is the greatest aspect of my own personal Ming that I would like to hand over to the mandate of Heaven. I hope this example has made it clear exactly how the *Yi Jing* should be used; now you can give it a try. Just be warned: like the example above, the answer generated can sometimes be brutally honest about the lack of success of something.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE *YI JING*

Every version of the *Yi Jing* you look at will vary greatly in its interpretation of the answers contained within each hexagram. The more literally translated versions will contain very alchemical language with metaphors of lead, gold, tigers and dragons, whereas others will have been put into much plainer language. You must seek the version that works for you; as stated above, I suggest cross-referencing different texts until you find one that works well for you. The information given to you is sometimes quite obscure and at other times very clear. It can take some consideration to come to an understanding of what the *Yi Jing* is telling you as the circular nature of Daoism permeates the entire text. In order to do this, I would suggest that after you have taken your reading and looked at the commentary for the hexagram, sit back down into your Nei Dan practice, close your eyes, breathe gently and try to empty the mind of any stray thoughts. Just allow the information to move through you and wait. The language of the *Yi Jing*

is designed to speak to your consciousness, not your acquired mind, so do not take the words immediately into your intellectual mind. Instead, allow them to move through the stillness of your sitting practice and suddenly insight will come. This spontaneous realization is what you are seeking. This is important because after some time of using the *Yi Jing* you will be able to discard the text altogether. You will have become so experienced with the symbols that they alone are enough to generate a reaction from within the core of your being.

THE *YI JING* AND NEI DAN

The *Yi Jing* is interwoven throughout all alchemical texts left to us by the enigmatic Daoists. You will see principles discussed in terms of trigrams, hexagrams and cycles of Yin and Yang. Often the alchemical language used within the classics has been directly lifted from the *Yi Jing* itself. There is a deep reason for this. The Daoists have long believed that spoken or written language is inadequate when it comes to explaining a practice such as Nei Dan. Though aware of the irony of stating this in a book such as this, I would tend to agree. The language of words is the language of the acquired mind. This means that, no matter what you are told or what you read, these will only really fuel your intellect, not your innate wisdom. For this reason, the Daoists attempted to use symbolic language in the form of the hexagrams. These symbols, when used for long enough through an art such as divination, would gradually begin to speak right past your acquired mind through to the depths of your consciousness. In this way, by observing the placement of the symbols you could develop an inner knowledge of the subject you were practising. You may never be able to put that knowledge into words, but you would be able to feel what is going on within your own 'knowing'. This is why, when I teach beginners in my own school, I try to use basic terms in order to help them understand the process I am trying to teach them. By the time they have been with me for a while, I try to use as much symbolic terminology as well as the Gua of the *Yi Jing*. Those who have engaged with the *Yi Jing* will then be able to understand the process on two levels, both with the acquired mind and through the inner aspect of their psyche. When writing this book on Nei Dan, I was aware that this aspect of the practice needed to be addressed and so I include these last two chapters on the practice of *Yi Jing* divination. I would urge any of you who are really interested in going deep into Nei Dan practice to learn how to use the *Yi Jing* and make it a part of your

everyday life. You will not understand how, any more than I do, but you will soon find that your innate knowledge of Nei Dan training begins to grow to ever-increasing levels. The *Yi Jing* is the language of the cosmos, the script of Dao put into a diagrammatic format. Learning to speak the language of Dao is an essential part of any Daoist practice.

CONGENITAL *YI JING* DIVINATION

The highest level of *Yi Jing* divination will naturally grow out of your practice of the acquired method of using the yarrow stalks. The congenital method is when the importance of the writing completely fades away, leaving only the six-lined symbols of the hexagrams. You will find that understanding the hexagrams comes from being able to comprehend the nature of the relationship between the two trigrams from which each is built. This understanding cannot come from intellectual study but rather from spending enough years working regularly with the *Yi Jing* texts so that you develop an intimate understanding of the nature of change. At this point you can then begin to use the stalks to discern the hexagram and then simply return to Nei Dan practice and allow the information to flood through your being. At this stage you are considered a true expert of *Yi Jing* divination. Beyond this lie the stages of learning how to read the Gua from within the external environment as well as from the movement of the Heavenly bodies. Unfortunately, this is a stage I am still yet to reach with the *Yi Jing*, so I cannot rightly discuss it with any sense of authority.

I sincerely hope that as many readers as possible will have a try with the *Yi Jing*. Give it some patience and a little trust and you will find that it quickly enriches many aspects of your Ming. Also remember that this has only been a brief introduction to the use of the *Yi Jing*; there is a whole wealth of depth hidden within the 'classic of change', enough to keep you busy for several lifetimes…

Appendix 1

CONGENITAL QI GONG

I have included here a translation of a popular classical text on Daoist Nei Dan. The text was written sometime in the early 1900s and is considered one of most openly shared set of instructions on alchemy to come out of China. Much of the metaphorical imagery usually present within Nei Dan writings is omitted in favour of tangible instruction. There are countless ways to progress through the path of Nei Dan and each teacher will present the process in a slightly different manner. In this case, the practices outlined in this text differ from the processes I have written about in this book, but at the same time there are many similarities which should be of interest to those wishing to compare systems. When translating the text, I have done my best to adjust the nature of Chinese writing so that it makes sense when put into English. Also note that the original writer used the term 'congenital Qi Gong' when referring to the process I name Nei Dan within this book.

TRANSLATION OF CONGENITAL QI GONG CLASSIC

Congenital Qi Gong from the Daoist tradition is a way to cultivate both your Xing and your Ming. It has been passed down for many generations from teacher to student and is an effective way to clear the body of illness and improve the strength of your health. With practice, it can promote excellent levels of longevity. Originally, these practices were taught by passing them down through transmission with no reliance on the limited language of words. Later, written records were made but they were difficult to understand due to the metaphorical language used. Few people ever really understood these teachings and even fewer received the entire transmission of the theories. These writings are the result of my own studies and I hope they will help the next generation of practitioners.

Theory of the Congenital and the Acquired Treasures

The three powers are Heaven, Earth and man; each of these has three further treasures. The Sun, the Moon and the Constellations are the three treasures of Heaven. Fire, Wind and Water are the three treasures of Earth. Shen, Qi and Jing are the three treasures of man. The three treasures of man begin to form into one as we move close to our demise. The three treasures of man also have a congenital and an acquired form. The congenital are Yuan Shen, Yuan Qi and Yuan Jing. The acquired forms of these treasures are known as the spirit of intellect, the energy of breath and the essence of tangibility. The congenital and the acquired forms of the treasures interplay with each other throughout our life.

It is tricky for us to understand and intellectualize the difference between the congenital and the acquired due to their close relationship. The Yuan Shen is that of true consciousness, whereas acquired Shen is that of our thought. They are two but one, separate yet the same. Congenital Jing is stillness, whereas the acquired Jing is the fuel of desire. Congenital energy is true and upright; the acquired energy is the power of breath. Only through hard work and meditative practices can an honest practitioner understand what this means.

Consolidate the Nature to Build the Energy

First, we must cultivate stillness as this is vital to congenital Qi Gong practice. Only an undisturbed Xin can effectively work with and lead our Qi. When we practise, we will always find that the mind is full of many thoughts; it is as unkempt as a wildly overgrown bush. This causes the Shen to become dazed. We must train to keep stillness in our Xin during every aspect of our daily life, including when we speak, listen, watch or interact with others; this is important. To help expand our energy, we must keep our meditative state when sitting, standing, sleeping or moving around. We must stay firm in our efforts. The sages say that we should walk as if moving on a long flat road; when standing we should move our Shen into the void of emptiness; in sitting we must lead the breath into the lower Dan Tien; and when lying down we must preserve the elixir we are cultivating. Expand your energy through such diligence. In this way the Xin will calm, the Fire will clear and the mood will regulate itself; any resentment will fade away.

Second, we must cultivate our Xing to silence the mind; these thoughts originate from within the stillness at the centre of the Xin disturbing it. If this is the case, we cannot unite the energy of the Xin with the treasure of breath. We must gather the scattered Xing and generate the light of Shen. Cultivate your stillness, collect your Xing, perceive the light and silence the acquired mind. From here you will see the white mist. This happens as the Shen can move out from the stillness. The waves of movement come next as the energy

of the macrocosm moves into the Heart. From here comes true emptiness, but this takes time; be patient. At this time the Xin is still.

The perceived light is the manifestation of your Xing; it can only exist if the Xing is consolidated and strong. Use the light to ascertain the strength of the Xing.

To perceive the light we must sit in stillness. Gently collect the mind before the eyes. The position is both there but not there; yet it is always illuminated. This is the method of perceiving the white mist. This will make the small mind big and the small light shine brightly. The movements will come and then the light of stillness will arrive. The light will appear misshapen but will gradually become fixed and uniform. But beware; you cannot over-use the imagination for this process. One should not strive as stillness is required. Train from 11 at night until five in the morning, especially beginners. The increase of Yang Qi at this time will aid in the training.

Cultivate the Spirit in the Region of the Energy

When the Xing is consolidated and the mind is still, the white mist will appear. Now the awareness should be led down to the lower Dan Tien region. This will help the stillness to remain within the Xin.

This will help the awareness to light up the regions of the cavities of Qi. The energy now neither stays nor leaves; it is vaguely there but yet brightly lit in stillness. It remains in the deep peacefulness, in the dusky emptiness. It rids the body of the dormant psychological devils. The true Xin remains steadfast and alone; although it is still, you may feel the breath in the silence. It breathes in towards the collecting point of Qi but not lower, and upwards when exhaling towards the Heart but not higher. When the mind and the breath are linked, you may let your psyche fade away. The Heart will rest with the Qi and the Qi will secretly and subtly enwrap the Xin. They become a single unit resting within a fog of Heart energy.

Returning Saliva to Essence

The saliva can be used in our practice. It can be converted into a disease-fighting agent. High-level saliva can lead to longevity. Saliva is born from the Water of the Kidneys and has a relationship to the Blood of the Heart. The two, when combined in the fluid, can help to promote Yuan Jing.

It is classically said that the mouth is the 'Jade Pool' in the 'Palace of Heaven'. Through the consumption of its fluid the magical will of the Ling can erase disease and internal evils. During all activities rest the tongue on the roof of the mouth and thus the saliva will be cultivated. When the mouth is full of saliva, use the correct technique of extending the neck and swallowing

to absorb the essence of the saliva. When you have mastered this, the saliva will reach the Dan Tien; stillness will be born and loss of self will be the result. This is the culmination of work with the intention and the Xin. From this profound inner stillness, movement will be born. Yin will become Yang and the Yuan Jing will be nourished.

When Do We Cultivate Essence?

Between 11 at night and one in the morning, there is a rise of Yang; midnight is the peak. The body will wish to naturally align with Heaven and Earth at this time.

Although it is easy to cultivate Yang at this time, human beings easily fall under the spell of desire which will harm our practice. For this reason we can also use the rising of inner Yang which takes place between three and five in the morning. This is known as the 'living Zi time'. In contacting the Yang of this hour, there will be external occurrences. We must understand that this occurrence is due to clear or polluted Kidney Water. Our job is to cultivate the clear water through a still mind. A mind that is moving will only produce the polluted water which is no good for our practice.

Consolidating the Jing and Understanding the Timing and Strength of the Fire

In consolidating the Jing, one must use the will to lead it towards the lower furnace. It is important that we understand the timing for this practice and how to ensure that any Fire is safely managed. This is the key method for converting Jing into Qi. If this method is not followed, it is difficult to consolidate Jing and avoid it leaking from the body.

The Fire must be cultivated and regulated in the furnace, whereas the Yuan Jing is gathered and utilized through silent sitting practices. In order to cultivate the stillness, we must let go of our connection to the outside. We must be able to enter true emptiness in order for the required Shen to consolidate. Gently lead the awareness down to awaken the Dan Tien region. This will help the Yuan Jing to converge, which ends the desires of the polluted Kidney Water. The practice now consists of lifting the perineum and using the breath to lead Qi to the Dan Tien. Ten times lead the Jing to the furnace where it can be converted. Now you must enter stillness in the Xin. Ensure that the Jing used is not from Polluted Water. Understand this technique along with sucking, pressing, lifting and sealing the mouth.

Breathe the resultant essence up through the three doorways to the Heavenly cauldron. Now let it sink to the Earthly cauldron. Return it in this way to the Dan Tien. Cultivate the warmth of your Fire and utilize the aforementioned

principles to consolidate the Yuan Jing. In time you will completely dissolve away from the external world.

The Alchemical Transformation of Essence to Energy

When the Jing has been led into the furnace, it is time to progress. This is the stage of consolidating Yuan Qi. To do this we must understand the difference between the 'martial fire' and the 'scholar fire'. Use directed attention to differentiate between the two fires.

Breathe 36 times with the martial fire technique, leading the breath to the core; this breath should be consolidated within the Dan Tien.

Now allow the Shen to gently glow for 24 breaths through the scholar fire method. Practise diligently every night. Do not deviate from this method and avoid practice during the daytime. Gradually this will warm the Dan Tien and the Jing will flourish. There will be a great harmonization of your Qi and the mist will gather. If you train long enough in this way, you will understand the method of 'opening and closing' the furnace. This is also known as 'refining the medicine'.

Consolidating the Energy Within the Eight Congenital Meridians

In order to progress to this stage, we must first successfully complete the prior stages of converting Jing into Qi and converting the Dan Tien. The Jing will become still and the Dan Tien will naturally become warm. The cavities will be full of Qi.

At this time you should remain still and firm in your practice. Your mind will become quiet as if you are standing in the shadows. Allow your progress to evolve naturally. Do not add to it in any way and yet do not ignore it. Simply observe and guard the Qi you have gathered through the use of your consciousness. This is in case the Qi becomes scattered.

Continue in this way until the heat in the furnace reaches a high. Then use your intention to lead it. Lead towards the base of the spine. This should adhere to the principle: 'If the Qi does not want to move, then I do not move. If the Qi wants to move, then I move first.'

When the Qi is abundantly consolidated, it will rise towards the crest of the head. It will transform into sweet-tasting liquid with a flash of perceived light. This liquid will begin to enter the Ren meridian as well as fully filling the mouth. This fluid is rooted in the marrow and the brain. As it travels into the Dan Tien, it makes a different vibrational pattern from the saliva of the mouth.

As this liquid travels, it fully integrates the eight congenital meridians into one single network. Note that if you are not yet strong enough either physically or energetically, you will need some time to achieve this. Guard the process with your Shen and accomplish your goal over several sessions.

Always be patient and wait until the Qi has the desire to move on its own before leading it to the base of the spine and along the back. If it is not strong enough, then let it rest and use your Shen to guard it through constant observation. Use guided intention to move it when it is ready. Gradually, you will get it past the base of the skull into the 'mud pill palace'. This will begin the conversion to sweet fluid which will return down into the Dan Tien.

Small Water Wheel Methodology: Converting Essence in Order to Strengthen the Brain's Marrow

The 'small water wheel' generates Qi through regular practice. Guide your Qi into the Ren and Du meridians and lead it through the circulation down into the lower Dan Tien. This is the microcosmic path. When this is done, you may enter stillness and Qi will be born like a new spark. The external world will become still and distant; it is important to be patient and remain in this state. In time the Qi will begin to develop the desire to move of its own accord; as before, use the Shen to guide it.

On each inhalation the energy will rise to the crown and then fall to the Dan Tien upon exhalation. Thus a circulation is completed. Guard your process with your Shen. Still and illuminated, illuminated and still. Within the emptiness you should break down your conceptual understandings and enter a focused state. This is the beginning of the great rebirth. This is the full process of returning the Jing to convert the substance of the brain.

Combining Energy and Spirit, Circulating Through the Ren and Du Orbit

When the above circuits have been moved past, you will be able to differentiate between movement through rotation and stillness. The Dan Tien must reach the stage of becoming warm without regulation. This will ensure the Yuan Qi is being generated. Do not let this energy leak; lead it towards your centre and the 'yellow court'. Here it is mixed with your Shen; they combine within the thick mist you have formed within the stillness. It must remain still in the now quiet consciousness.

After some time the Yuan Qi will begin to move. This will be the result of the furnace and not the perceived light of Shen. Allow this energy to follow the circuit through the Dan Tien, into the 'small water wheel', along the base

of the skull and into the 'mud pill palace'. From here it descends back into the lower Dan Tien.

When you reach this level, you will find that the Shen will follow the movement of your Qi; it is out of your control. This is the path to rebirth which will lead you to enter the great stillness for longer periods. Within the depths of this stillness the spiritual light shines like mercury.

The 'small water wheel' will continue for 300 revolutions before it will begin to slow down and stop. After this is rebirth, the higher stages of practice. This is known as the rotation of the Fa Lun wheel.

Sealing the Yang Fire and Nourishing Life

When the Fa Lun wheel has been achieved, the true Qi will not pass through the Yang gateway. The external is now beyond your care. Good health will come and old chronic disease will be shed. The body will regulate its own temperature and the harshness of cold and heat will no longer be of concern.

The Shen and the Qi are full and the spiritual essence is satisfied. Although this is a joyous state, one must continue to seek the contentment of stillness within the core.

Store your Shen and your Qi; look after your newly natural state. Your hearing will become good; your eyes will shine brightly. When you have nourished the Qi in this way, you will fend off disease, and longevity will be yours. This is the best method of nourishing life which has been passed to us by the ancients.

FOOTNOTE

The writings here are by Kuang Chang Xiu Daozhang. Born in 1905, he studied for over half a century and left this guidance. Do not strive too hard and allow the process to unfold naturally. Be systematic and progress steadily, and in this way you may attain the above levels without a teacher.

TRANSLATION NOTE

When translating this text, I have adjusted some of the terminology so that it matches that used throughout this book. For example, the original author used the term 'micro-cosmic orbit' whereas I have used the term 'small water wheel'. In this and similar cases I have adjusted the terms so as to avoid any confusion. For those who would like the original Chinese, which includes the original terms, I have included the text below.

Appendix 2

THE FIRING TIMES CHART

Shown in Figure A.1 is the Huo Huo Tu which can be translated as meaning the 'firing times chart'. This is a classical chart dated to around 1280. It is an alchemical chart showing the natural correspondences that take place between the microcosm of the human body and the macrocosm of the wider universe. Wise practitioners can use the information in this chart to identify the most auspicious times to practise Nei Dan and to understand how the human entity exists between Heaven and Earth.

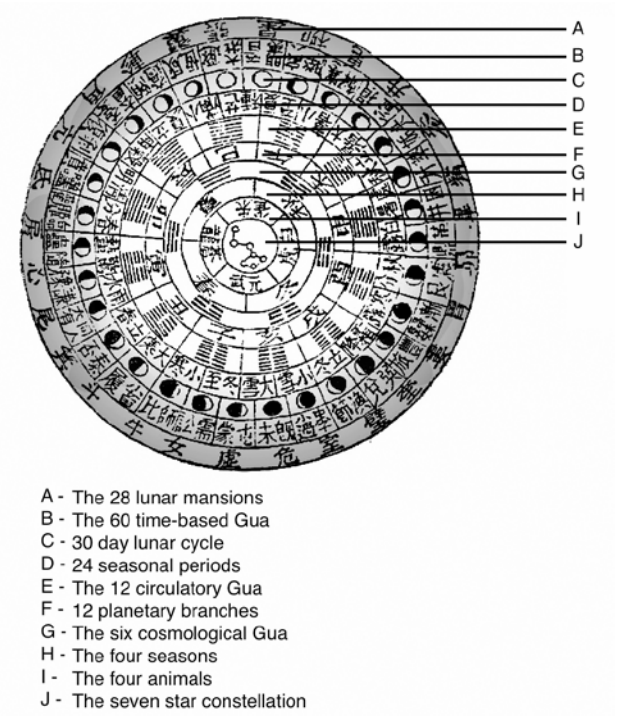


Figure A.1: The Firing Times Chart

At the centre of the chart sits the 'seven star constellation', commonly known as the Big Dipper or Plough in the West. When observing the 'seven star constellation' in the night sky, it appears to rotate around its axis one degree each night for a total of 360 nights. According to ancient Daoist cosmological beliefs, it was this rotation that dictated the passing of time and the shifting of Yin and Yang energies through the Heavens. As the 'seven star constellation' rotated, it scooped up the Yang Qi like some giant astrological ladle and then redistributed it throughout the constellations of the night sky. Each of these constellations represented a different elemental energy within the Heavens and this information was then passed down into the realms of humanity. These beliefs became the basis for Daoist astrology as well as showing how the 'mandate of Heaven' created the cycles of Yin and Yang within everything from the seasons of the year to our life cycles.

Starting from the outside ring of the chart, each of the alchemical correspondences of the 'firing times chart' will be discussed.

THE 28 LUNAR MANSIONS

The 28 lunar mansions are the various constellations of the ancient Chinese night sky. Each of these lunar mansions falls under the sway of one of the key elemental sections of the sky. Students of astrological Dao would understand how the movements of Yin and Yang would have an effect on the energy of the environment, depending upon which of the lunar mansions was dominant in the sky at that time. Each lunar mansion has its own Wu Xing quality as well as its own individual connections to the movement of Shen through the cosmos. Through Shen Gong practices, the various energetic interplays of the lunar mansions can be perceived visually as lines of white light by the advanced practitioner. These lines form a network of 'meridian-like' lines across the sky. Table A.1 shows the names and energetic correspondences of the 28 lunar mansions.

Table A.1: The 28 Lunar Mansions

Chinese	English	Western	Animal
角 Jiao	Horn	Virgo	Dragon
亢 Kang	Neck	Virgo	Dragon
氐 Di	Base	Libra	Dragon
房 Fang	Room	Scorpio	Dragon
心 Xin	Heart	Scorpio	Dragon
尾 Wei	Tail	Scorpio	Dragon
箕 Ji	Basket	Sagittarius	Dragon
斗 Dou	Ladle	Sagittarius	Turtle
牛 Niu	Cowherd Boy	Capricorn	Turtle
女 Nu	Maiden	Aquarius	Turtle
虛 Xu	Chasm	Aquarius	Turtle
危 Wei	Rooftop	Aquarius	Turtle
室 Shi	House	Pegasus	Turtle
壁 Bi	Wall	Pegasus	Turtle
奎 Kui	Rising	Pisces	Tiger
婁 Lou	Mound	Aries	Tiger
胃 Wei	Stomach	Aries	Tiger
昴 Mao	Head	Taurus	Tiger
畢 Bi	Net	Taurus	Tiger
觜 Zi	Beak	Orion	Tiger
參 Shen	Orion	Orion	Tiger
井 Jing	Well	Gemini	Phoenix
鬼 Gui	Ghost	Cancer	Phoenix
柳 Liu	Willow	Hydra	Phoenix
星 Xing	Star	Hydra	Phoenix
張 Zhang	Bow	Hydra	Phoenix
翼 Yi	Wings	Hydra	Phoenix
軫 Zhen	Carriage	Corvus	Phoenix

To fully connect with the lunar mansions and the energies of the stars, your body needs time to learn how to resonate with them. In order to achieve this, you must be living out underneath them for periods of time. From here an intuitive understanding of their energies and effects will begin to grow within you. In modern times we tend to live inside our houses, removed from the wider environment, and thus many of these innate connections have begun to fade.

THE 60 TIME-BASED GUA

The 60 time-based Gua are the six-line hexagrams of the *Yi Jing* arranged in a sequential pattern around the edge of the chart. They show the fluctuations of Yin and Yang within the wider environment that take place over the course of a year. Four of the symbols are removed from the overall sequence; these are Qian, Kun, Li and Kan. This is because Qian and Kun represent Heaven and Earth, the two poles between which all of time plays out, and Li and Kan, Fire and Water, represent the acquired forms of Yang and Yin which manifest as the realm of existence. Li and Kan are the sun and moon cycling within the cosmos, beneath Heaven and above Earth. Together these are the four Gua that are beyond time and space. It is for this reason that they are the key Gua we are attempting to manipulate through the 'mixing of Kan and Li' aspect of Nei Dan.

An interesting way to use the cycle of the 60 Gua in your practice is to use the *Yi Jing* to understand the nature of the change taking place within any present moment. Then use the chart above to understand what are the various microcosmic and macrocosmic associations of those two Gua as they transform. The relative interaction of Yin and Yang can be understood easily through this chart, along with the elemental nature of the change taking place. This can give you an insight into the various inner levels of change within your reading.

THE 30-DAY LUNAR CYCLE

The 30-day cycle of the phases of the moon shows the relative rising and sinking of Yin and Yang in our night sky. This is one of the most powerful correspondences between macrocosmic Yin Yang changes and microcosmic cycles within the body. As we move towards the full moon, our Qi and Blood become more nourished and rise up within the vessels. As we move towards the new moon, the opposite is true and our energy wanes. The

natural cycle of the movement of Qi through the 'small water wheel' also matches this cycle, with the predominance of a pulse of energy which is linked to the moon's changes.

THE 24 SEASONAL PERIODS

The 24 seasonal periods of the five elemental forces are a manifestation within the external environment. These elemental shifts are then further broken down into 24 seasonal periods which are listed in Table A.2.

Table A.2: The 24 Seasonal Periods

Period	Chinese	Translation
Da Xue	大雪	Big Snow
Xiao Xue	小雪	Small Snow
Li Dong	立冬	Winter Begins
Shuang Jiang	霜降	Frost Descends
Han Lu	寒露	Cold Dew
Qiu Fen	秋分	Autumn Equinox
Bai Lu	白露	White Dew
Chu Shu	處暑	Heat's Limit
Li Qiu	立秋	Autumn Starts
Da Shu	大暑	Big Heat
Xiao Shu	小暑	Small Heat
Xia Zhi	夏至	Summer Solstice
Mang Zhong	芒種	Grain Grows
Xiao Man	小滿	Grain Filling
Li Xia	立夏	Summer Begins
Gu Yu	穀雨	Harvest Rain
Qing Ming	清明	Bright Clarity
Chun Fen	春分	Vernal Equinox
Jing Zhe	驚蟄	Waking Insects
Yu Shui	雨水	Rain Water
Li Chun	立春	Spring Begins
Da Han	大寒	Big Cold
Xiao Han	小寒	Small Cold
Dong Zhi	冬至	Winter Solstice

These 24 periods show the rising of Yang towards its peak during the summer and then a sinking of Yang towards the middle of winter. The rising of Yin works in the opposite manner, with its peak being midwinter and its lowest ebb being the middle of summer. These energetic cycles are reflected within the realm of man, meaning that summers are times of growth, energy and movement, whereas winter is a time of stillness, quiet contemplation and preservation of energy. Understanding these natural seasonal rhythms is important if we wish to maintain our health and seek an optimum level of balance. The more we can bring ourselves into sync with these seasonal periods, the higher degree of success we will have in our Nei Dan practice. This is because the natural flows of information within our body will then match those of nature, which will actually prepare a lot of the foundation work for alchemy without us having to consciously interfere to any major degree.

THE 12 CIRCULATORY GUA

The 12 circulatory Gua are a model of the rising of Yang and the growth of Yin that takes place within the body in accordance with the various other cycles which are represented within the 'firing times chart'. These 12 Gua are shown in Figure A.2.

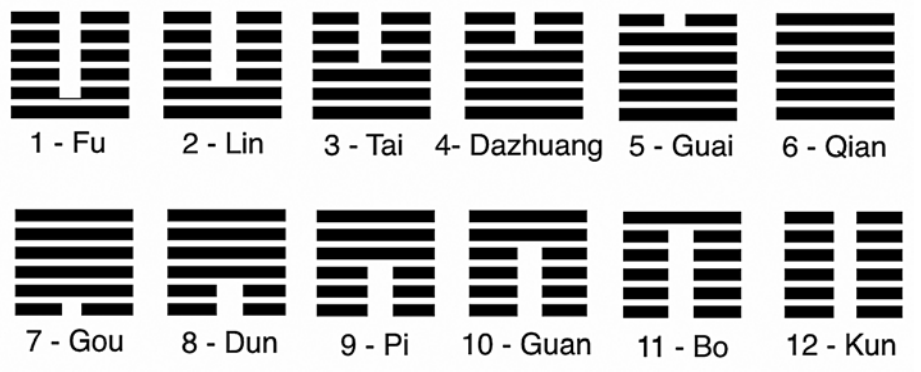


Figure A.2: The 12 Circulatory Gua

The first six show the rising of Yang until it reaches a peak at the Gua of Qian. The second six Gua show the phase of the rising of Yin as Qian changes to Kun. This diagrammatic representation of Yin and Yang cycling is often depicted in alchemical texts and classical charts. Understanding and

working with this cycle is important when circulating energy through the various obits of the meridian system.

THE 12 EARTHLY BRANCHES

The cycle of energy according to the 12 Earthly branches shows the connection between the flow of Qi within the body and various aspects of time, including the month and the time of the day. These are summarized in Table A.3.

Table A.3: The Twelve Earthly Branches

Branch	Month Number	Time	Organ
Zi	11	11pm to 1am	Gall Bladder
Chou	12	1am to 3am	Liver
Yin	1	3am to 5am	Lung
Mao	2	5am to 7am	Large Intestine
Chen	3	7am to 9am	Stomach
Si	4	9am to 11am	Spleen
Wu	5	11am to 1pm	Heart
Wei	6	1pm to 3pm	Small Intestine
Shen	7	3pm to 5pm	Bladder
You	8	5pm to 7pm	Kidney
Xu	9	7pm to 9pm	Pericardium
Hai	10	9pm to 11pm	Triple Burner

Also attached to the cycle of the 12 Earthly branches is the flow of Qi which takes place through the 12 key organs of the body according to Chinese medical theory.

THE SIX COSMOLOGICAL GUA

The six cosmological Gua are the six trigrams that are left when the extreme poles of Yin and Yang are taken away. These six symbols show the various interplays of Yin and Yang that can take place upon the 'stage of life' which is played out between Heaven and Earth. These six symbols

are of particular importance in the development of medicinal theory which connects the human being to the energy of the environment. These six Gua become the energies of Heat, Cold, Damp, Dryness, Wind Cold and Wind Heat within the environment as well as important variations on the level of Yin and Yang and form a broad overview of the rest of the information contained within the 'firing times chart'.

THE FOUR SEASONS

The cycling of the four seasons is the most obvious of the shifting environmental manifestations of Yin and Yang. This is the cycle that we are most immediately aware of. These four seasons also correspond to the five elements with summer being Fire, autumn being Metal, winter being Water and spring being Wood. The point of change between these cycles is the element of Earth. The classical tenets of Chinese medicinal theory would tell us that summer is a time when our energy is at its peak, autumn is when energy begins to recede, winter is when energy is at its lowest and spring is when it begins to move upwards once more. These are cycles that we should follow and work alongside in both our life and our practice.

THE FOUR ANIMALS

The four animals have been discussed extensively in this book and are the depictions of the four key elements in this chart. They are the red phoenix as Fire, the white tiger as Metal, the black turtle as Water and the green dragon as Wood. They are also important as they are the four key sections of the sky within which the 28 lunar mansions reside. The movement of the planets and stars across these four major zones dictates the shifting of the Wu Xing throughout the course of the year.

CONCLUSION

The 'firing times chart' is one of the most useful diagrams to come out of the Daoist alchemical tradition. It shows a multitude of correlations between the microcosm of the human body and macrocosm of the wider environment. Almost all theories of existence can be looked at through the lens of this theory because life must be subject to constant change, for that is the law of Daoism. Although this has been only a brief introduction to the chart, I urge all sincere practitioners of the Daoist arts to study this

chart and its various levels of meaning. Through study of the cycles of life and energy within which I live, I have thoroughly strengthened not only my health but also my ability within the arts of Qi Gong, Nei Dan and Chinese medicine. I have also understood the interwoven nature of these three arts because it is the cycles of Yin and Yang that really bring together all aspects of the Daoist tradition.

GLOSSARY OF PINYIN TERMS

This is a glossary of Chinese terms used throughout this book as well as my previous titles. Included are the Pinyin version of the word, the Chinese characters and a brief explanation of the term.

Ba Gua 八卦 The Daoist theory of the eight key energies of the universe. This is the basic tenet of the *Yi Jing* as well as countless other aspects of the tradition.

Bai Hui 百會 (Du 20) An acupuncture point situated on top of the head. It is translated as meaning 'hundred meetings'. In esoteric Daoism it is also the point where numerous spirits converge and the point where the Chong Mai extends upwards out of the body.

Bi Yan Hu 碧眼胡 The 'blue-eyed foreigner'; a name for Bodhidharma, the patriarch of Chan Buddhism within China.

Chan 禪 The form of Buddhism commonly taught in China. A combination of Buddhist and Daoist theory.

Chong Mai 衝脈 A system of congenital meridians which run through the spine, vertically through the body and as two side branches which run within the left anf right sides of the torso.

Da Zhou Tian 大周天 'Large heavenly cycle', also known as the 'large water wheel of Qi'. This is the primary circulation of energy out of the body which can be achieved through consistent Nei Gong or Nei Dan training.

Dan 丹 The Dan is the 'elixir' which is sought through alchemical training in the Daoist tradition. Often depicted as red and likened to the ore of cinnabar.

Dan Tien 丹田 Usually refers to the lowest of the three main 'elixir fields', although there are three main Dan Tien within the body. The primary functions of the lower Dan Tien are the conversion of Jing to Qi and the moving of Qi throughout the meridian system.

Dao 道 The nameless and formless origin of the universe. Daoism is the study of this obscure concept and all internal arts are a way of experientially understanding the nature of Dao.

Dao De Jing 道德經 The 'virtue of following the way'. The classical text of Daoism written by the great sage Laozi. Also written as *Tao Te Ching*.

Dao Yin 導引 'Guiding and pulling' exercises. These are the ancient exercises developed by the shamanic Wu people to purge the energy body of pathogenic energies.

Dao Zang 道藏 The *Dao Zang* is the Daoist canon of classical writings which includes more than 1400 pieces of scripture.

De 德 The congenital manifestation of the transient emotions. De is born from deep within the true human consciousness which is usually buried beneath the various layers of the acquired mind.

Ding 鼎 The 'cauldron' of Daoist Nei Dan. This is a location within the energy body where two energetic substances are being combined. Named after the Ding which sits within most Daoist temples.

Dui 兌 One of the eight trigrams of Daoist Ba Gua theory. Its energetic manifestation is metaphorically likened to a lake, although Dui does not directly mean lake.

Du 督脈 The congenital meridian which runs up the centre of a person's back. It governs all of the Yang meridians functions.

Feng Shui 風水 'Wind and water.' This is the Daoist study of environmental energies and the influence of the macrocosm upon the human energy system and consciousness.

Fu 符 The magical talismanic drawings of the ancient Daoists. The skilled practitioner of magical Daoism could draw Fu to heal sickness, curse people or perform countless other functions. An almost extinct art in modern times.

Gen 艮 One of the eight trigrams of Daoist Ba Gua theory. Its energetic manifestation is likened to that of a mountain.

Gong 功 The attainment of a high-level skill within any art. To truly attain Gong takes a lifetime of dedicated study, especially within the internal arts.

Gua 卦 'Trigram'. These are the eight sacred symbols that make up Daoist Ba Gua theory. They are a way to conceptualize the various vibrational frequencies of the energetic realm and how they interact.

Hou Tian 後天 The 'post-Heaven' state in which we exist according to Daoist thought.

Hui Yin 會陰 (Ren 1) 'Meeting of Yin' is an acupuncture point located at the perineum. It is so named because it is situated within the most Yin area of the human body.

Hun 魂 'Yang soul', the ethereal soul which continues to exist after our death. It is usually housed within the Liver.

Ji Ben Qi Gong 基本气功 'Fundamental energy exercises'. The primary exercises taught within the Lotus Nei Gong School of Daoist Arts.

Jing 精 The lowest vibrational frequency of the three main energetic substances of man. Usually translated as meaning 'essence' and often misunderstood as being human sexual fluids.

Jing Gong 精功 'Essence exercises'. The technique of building up and refining our Jing.

Jing Jin 經筋 Lines of connective tissue and Fascia which serve as the 'riverbeds' for the meridian pathways.

Jing Luo 经络 The human meridian system which is made up of numerous energetic pathways which regulate the body and transport Qi to and from our organs and tissues.

Kan 坎 One of the eight trigrams of Daoist Ba Gua theory which is usually likened to the energetic manifestation of Water. Especially important within the practice of Nei Dan.

Kun 坤 One of the eight trigrams of Daoist Ba Gua theory. Its energetic manifestation is usually likened to that of the planet.

Kun Lun 崑崙山 A mythical mountain within Daoist legend which was said to reach up into the Heavens.

Lao Gong 勞宮 (PC 8) An acupuncture point situated in the centre of the palm. Its name means 'palace of toil' due to it being on the human hand which carries out a lot of physical work. Within Daoism this point is very important in venting heat from the heart and so it is rarely at rest. It is a very important point in Qi Gong practice because it regulates the internal temperature and also allows us to emit Qi in practices such as external Qi therapy.

Laozi 老子 The great sage. The 'original Daoist' who wrote the *Dao De Jing*. Supposedly, he left this text with a border watchman when he retreated into hermitage in the western mountains of China.

Li 離 One of the eight trigrams of Daoist Ba Gua theory. Its energetic manifestation is usually likened to Fire. It is especially important to understand within the context of Nei Dan training.

Liang Yi 兩儀 The collective name for Yin and Yang. Literally translated as meaning the 'two poles'.

Long Dao Yin 龍導引 'Dragon Dao Yin'. A set of four sequences based upon the preliminary training methods from the martial style of Baguazhang. They twist the spine and open the joints to assist with the energetic purging process.

Lu 爐 The 'furnace' of Daoist Nei Dan. This is the place within the body where expansion is created which generates heat. This heat is then usually added to the Ding in order to create alchemical change.

Ming 命 Your predestined journey from life to death. Usually translated as meaning 'fate' but this really does not explain the true meaning of the term.

Ming Men 命門 (Du 4) An acupuncture point in the lower back that is very important in Nei Gong practice. This point is referred to several times in this book and serious internal arts practitioners should work very hard to awaken the energy in this area of their meridian system.

Nei Dan 內丹 The Daoist form of alchemical meditation usually associated with the northern sects of Daoism. Through working with various energetic and spiritual substances within the body, the practitioner seeks states of transcendence and, ultimately, immortality.

Nei Gong 內功 The process of internal change and development which a person may go through if they practise the internal arts to a high level.

Nei Jing Tu 內经图 The 'chart of the inner landscape'. One of two important alchemical charts carved into a courtyard wall of the 'White Cloud Temple' in Beijing.

Nu Dan 女丹 The practice of 'women's alchemy'. A slightly different process exists for women due to the nature of their energetic systems.

Po 魄 The 'Yin soul' which dies with the human body. Largely connected to our physical senses; the Po resides in the Lungs.

Pu 樸 'Simplicity'. Often likened to being like an 'uncarved block'. The ideal state of mind according to the Daoist tradition. This has much to do with shedding the layers of the acquired mind which pull you away from existing in a simple state.

Qi 氣 'Energy'. A term that is often difficult to translate into English. In Nei Gong theory, it is an energetic vibration which transports information through the energy system.

Qi Gong 氣功 Usually gentle exercises combining rhythmic movements with breathing exercises to shift Qi through the body. The term means 'energy exercises', although it is sometimes translated as meaning 'breathing exercises'.

Qi Hai 氣海 (Ren 6) An acupuncture point which sits in front of the lower Dan Tien. In English its name means 'sea of Qi' because it is the point where Qi is generated and from where it flows. Like water returning to the sea in rivers and streams, Qi returns to the lower Dan Tien when it circulates in the 'small water wheel of Qi'.

Qian 乾 One of the eight trigrams of Daoist Ba Gua theory. Its energetic manifestation is usually likened to the movements of Heaven.

Ren 任脈 The congenital meridian which runs down the centre of a person's body. It governs all of the Yin meridians functions.

Ren 人 Within Daoism, Ren is 'humanity'. Humanity sits between Heaven and Earth and is a reflection of their fluctuations and movements. Ren is nourished by Earth and stimulated to development through the actions of Heaven.

San Bao 三寶 The 'three treasures' of man which are Jing, Qi and Shen.

Shen 神 The energy of consciousness. Vibrates at a frequency close to that of Heaven. It is manifested within the body as a bright white light.

Shen Gong 神功 This is the arcane skill of working with the substance of consciousness. Within Daoism it is said that a skilled Shen Gong practitioner can manipulate the very energy of the environment.

Shen Xian 神仙 The 'Heavenly immortal' is essentially full realization of the possibility of spiritual immortality, which is the final goal of Daoist Nei Dan.

Taiji 太极 A Daoist concept of creation which can be translated as meaning the 'motive force of creation'.

Tian 天 'Heaven'. Not to be mistaken for the Christian concept of Heaven, this refers to the vibrational frequency of the macrocosm. Within the microcosm of the body, Heaven is used to metaphorically refer to human consciousness.

Tian Gan 天干 The 'Heavenly stems' is a model of the Yin and Yang divisions which take place in the Wu Xing within the Heavenly realm.

Tui Na 推拿 A form of Chinese medical massage which means 'push and grasp'.

Wu 巫 The shamanic Wu were the historical ancestors of the Daoists. They served as medicine men, bringers of rain and general mystics to the ancient tribes of China.

Wu Shen 五神 The 'five spirits'. The collective name for the Shen, Hun, Yi, Zhi and Po.

Wu Wei 無為 The act of 'non-governing'. An important philosophical concept in the Daoist tradition. This term is often misunderstood to mean that Daoists should 'do' nothing and thus are essentially lazy.

Wu Xing 五行 The five elemental energies which are an important part of Daoist creation theory, psychology and medicine.

Wu Xing Qi Gong 五行气功 'Five Element energy exercises'. They are an important part of the Lotus Nei Gong School of Daoist Arts syllabus.

Wuji 無極 The Daoist concept of non-existence. The blank canvas upon which reality is projected and an important part of Daoist creation philosophy.

Xian Tian 先天 The 'before Heaven' congenital state which is all-important within Nei Dan training.

Xin-Yi 心意 'Heart-mind'. This is the framework with which we attempt to understand the various aspects of human consciousness. Originally a Buddhist concept, it was absorbed into Daoist teachings.

Xing 性 Your 'nature'. This is the expression of the various energetic and spiritual components of consciousness.

Xiu Zhen Tu 修真图 The 'chart of cultivating perfection'. A highly influential chart within the Daoist alchemical tradition.

Xun 巽 One of the eight trigrams of Daoist Ba Gua theory. Its energetic manifestation is usually likened to that of the wind.

Yang 陽 The Daoist philosophical extreme of movement, masculinity and action. One of the two great points which is required to manifest existence.

Yang Qi 阳氣 Within Chinese medicine this refers to our internal Qi which moves out towards the surface of the body and the congenital meridians. In Nei Dan theory it can also refer to the state of energy prior to its movement into the realm of existence.

Yang Sheng Fa 养生法 Literally 'life-nourishing principles'. This is the Daoist practice of living healthily which should be studied alongside all internal arts.

Yi 意 'Intention' or 'awareness'. An important element of human consciousness to cultivate in Nei Dan training.

Yi Jing 易經 The 'classic of change'. An ancient Daoist text which is based on Ba Gua theory. Commonly written as *I Ching*.

Yin 陰 The Daoist philosophical pole of stillness, femininity and quietude. One of the two poles required in order for existence to come into being.

Yin Qi 阴氣 Our internal Qi which moves inwards to nourish the organs of the body. Can also be used within alchemical theory to describe the movement of Wuji as it coalesces around the condensed energy of Yang Qi.

Yin Tang 印堂 A meridian point situated between the eyebrows. Translated as the 'hall of impression', it is often equated with the spiritual third eye of the Eastern arts.

Yong Quan 涌泉 (K1) An acupuncture point on the base of the foot which means 'bubbling spring'. This is the main point through which Earth energy is drawn into the body.

Yuan Jing 元精 The original essence which exists prior to the beginning of the movement of the acquired essence. It is said to reside in the space between the Kidneys.

Yuan Qi 元氣 The original state of Qi prior to its movement into the acquired realm.

Yuan Shen 元神 The original state of human psyche prior to the movement from the congenital to the acquired. It exists as a brilliant white light within the space of the human Heart-mind.

Yuan Xi 元息 'Original breath'. The breath of life which is passed down into existence from Dao. Yuan Xi is an expression of the movement of Yuan Qi.

Zang Fu 脏腑 The collective name for the Yin and Yang organs of the body.

Zhen 震 One of the eight trigrams of Daoist Ba Gua theory. Its energetic manifestation is often likened to thunder.

Zhen Ren 真人 The 'true person' of Daoism is a high-level state of attainment possible through alchemical cultivation of the inner state.

Zhi 志 An element of human consciousness which is directly linked to the state of our Kidneys. The nearest translation in English is 'will power'.

Zhuangzi 莊子 An important sage within the Daoist tradition. Zhuangzi was known for his humour and the fact that he poked fun at almost every aspect of life.

Zi Fa Gong 自發功 The process of releasing spontaneous energetic movements through the body. This happens as stagnant energetic pathogens are released and the body begins to return to some kind of order.

Ziran 自然 The Daoist philosophical concept of acting in harmony with nature and returning to an original state.

Zuo Wang 坐忘 This can be translated as meaning 'sitting and forgetting'. This is the entering of the silent state during Daoist meditation.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Damo Mitchell was born into a family of martial artists and so began his training at the age of four. This training has continued throughout his life and expanded to include the study of martial arts, various meditation systems and Chinese medicine. His studies continue to take him around the world in search of authentic masters of the ancient wisdom traditions that he teaches through his own school, Lotus Nei Gong, which has branches around the world.

Damo continues to spend his time travelling, teaching, writing and studying with various teachers. For several months each year he spends his time away from society working on his own practice as well as teaching his closer students. Below is a picture of Damo, his partner Roni and their 'house' on the edge of the Swedish forest where they currently spend their summers. The early draft of this book was written on the small table you can see in the background.



Damo, Roni and their 'Summer House'

For more information on Damo and his teachings, please visit his main website which can be found at: www.lotusneigong.com.

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